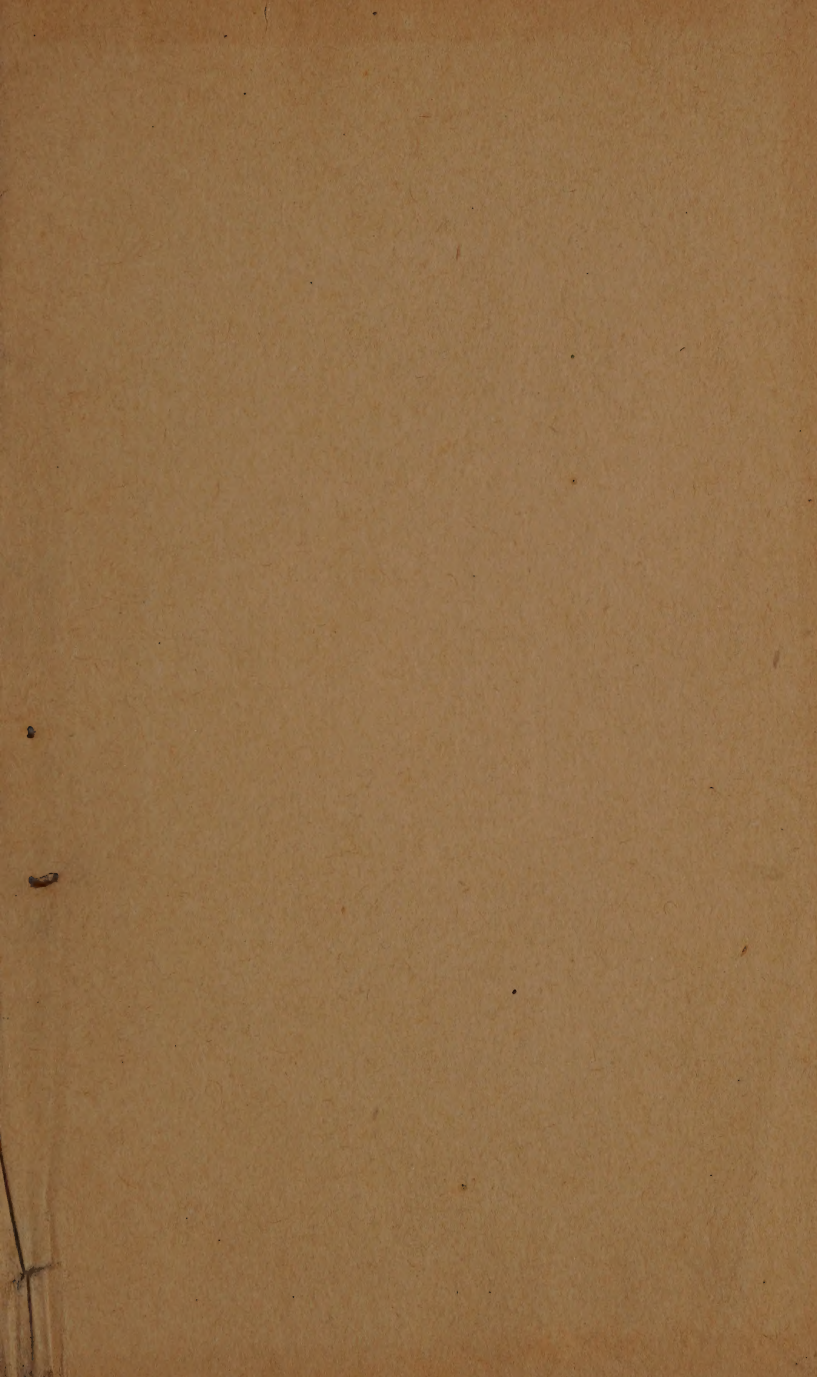




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CONFESSIONS

OF

A THUG.

BY

CAPTAIN MEADOWS TAYLOR,

IN THE SERVICE OF H.H. THE NIZAM.

I have heard, have read bold fables of enormity,
Devised to make men wonder, but this hardness
Transcends all fiction.

LAW OF LOMBARDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CONFESSIONS

OF

A THUG.

CHAPTER I.

HOW AMEER ALI CONDUCTED HIMSELF IN HIS DÉBUT AS A
PINDHAREE, AND HOW THE SAHOUKARS OF OOMRAOTEE
RECEIVED THEIR UNWELCOME VISITORS.

THE next afternoon we were all assembled on a small plain outside the town; Cheetoo had spread his carpet after the manner of a Pindharee, and sat with his chiefs around him, promising by his demeanour to be an eager spectator of the encounter. He was remarkably civil to me, and asked me to sit by him

until a few men, who were ready, had displayed their dexterity and prowess. On the signal being given by him, two stout Rajpoots leaped into the circle and clattered their sticks on each other's shield for some time without either touching the other.

"Does this please you?" said Cheetoo to me. "Those fellows are good hands, you see, at their weapons: neither would have drawn blood had they had swords in their hands."

"They are expert enough," said I, "but methinks they have played together before and know each other's ways; they make a great show, but if I may be pardoned, I think neither has much real skill. If my lord wishes, I will try either of them."

"Take care you are not overmatched," said he; "I would not have your fair fame sullied. You have already interested me much in your behalf."

"Do not fear for me," said I; "I will do my best."

I stripped myself to my trowsers, and girding a handkerchief tightly about my waist, I stepped into the circle, where one of the men, who had now rested from his first encounter, awaited me. I took a stick and a small shield

made of basket-work from Peer Khan, who had brought them, and advanced to the centre. There were murmurs among the assembly that I was overmatched, for they contrasted my slight form with the tall and brawny one of my antagonist; but I was not to be deterred by this. I knew my skill, and that mere personal strength would avail but little against it.

“How is it to be?” said I to the Rajpoot. “Does the first fair blow decide between us?”

“Certainly,” he replied. “I shall strike hard, so be on your guard.”

“Good,” said I: “now take your post.”

He did. He retired to one edge of the circle and advanced on me leisurely, now stooping and leaning his shield-arm on his knee as he rested a moment to survey me, and now circling round me, first rising on one leg and then on the other, and waving his stick in the air.

I stood perfectly still and in a careless attitude, but well on my guard, for I knew that I should hazard something in moving after him. It was evident to me he did not expect this, for he seemed for a moment irresolute, but at last he rushed on me with two or three bounds, and aimed a blow at my head. I was perfectly

prepared, for I knew his mode of attack ; I received the blow on my shield, caught the stick under it, and rained such a shower of blows on his undefended person as completely astonished him.

The assembly rang with plaudits, and the other Rajpoot stepped forward and saluted me.

“ You have had but short work with my friend Bheem Singh,” said he ; “ but now you must try me.”

“ I am ready,” I replied ; “ so get to your post.”

I had now an antagonist worthy of me ; he knew my system of play, and verily I thought myself for the moment engaged with my old instructor ; but I had used to vanquish him, and I did not fear the man before me. We were soon hotly engaged : he was as cool and wary as myself, and after a long conflict, in which neither had the advantage, we rested awhile, both out of breath.

“ Enough, enough !” cried Cheetoo ; “ you have both done bravely ; neither has won, and you had better let the matter stand as it is.”

“ Not so, Khodawund,” said I ; “ let us finish it ; one of us must win, and my friend

here desires as much as myself to see which of us is the better man. Is it not so?"

"Ay," said the fellow laughingly, "the Nuwab Sahib knows that no one as yet has overcome me; but I have fairly met my match: and whoever taught you was a good master, and has had a disciple worthy of him."

"As you will," said Cheetoo, "only play in good humour; let no feud grow out of it."

We both saluted him, and assured him we could not quarrel, and that whoever was victor must entertain a high respect for his opponent.

And to it we set again, as we had now recovered our breath: victory for a long time hovered between us, now inclining to the one and now to the other; we had both lost our footing once or twice, and the spectators would have had us leave off, but excited as we were it was impossible—we stopped not for their exclamations. I was put to my last shifts to avoid the well-directed blows of the Rajpoot; he had better wind than I, and this obliged me to alter my mode of play: hitherto I had attacked him, I now only warded off his cuts, but watched my opportunity. In his eagerness, thinking by a succession of blows he could beat

down my guard, he exposed his side, and my stick descended on his ribs with a sound which was heard by all, and with a force which fairly took away his breath; had my weapon been a sword I think I should have cut him in two.

“Fairly won!” cried Cheetoo; “fairly and bravely won! Ramdeen Singh, thou hast lost, but it is no disgrace to thee. Come to me by and by and I will reward thee.”

The Rajpoot laughed, and I was glad he bore the defeat so good-humouredly, for I had expected the contrary; he allowed that he had been vanquished, and cried out to all that it had been a fair encounter, and that he had used the utmost of his skill: “So beware;” he continued, “how any of you engage the Meer Sahib; you all know what I am, and I have been fairly beaten.”

I was delighted with the noble fellow, and addressed Cheetoo himself.

“I crave a boon, Khodawund, and if I may hope to have it granted, I will speak.”

“Say on,” he replied; “I will grant it readily.”

“Then,” said I, “let this brave fellow be placed under me. By your favour, a stranger has been entrusted with the command of part of

the Harawul (advance-guard), and I would have both these Rajpoots with me, and be allowed to entrust fifty men to the one and twenty-five to the other."

"Good," said Cheetoo, "let it be so; and do you, Ghuffoor Khan, look to it that it is done; these are the men who will serve us in the time of need."

A few days more and I was fairly installed into my new charge. Fortune had favoured me far above my expectations, and I saw naught before me but a career of distinction under my new master. True, I was no longer a leader on my own responsibility, but the rank I held was honourable, and perhaps far above my deserts. I seized an opportunity which presented itself, and wrote a full account of the whole to my father and Azima, for I knew that they would rejoice at tidings so new and unexpected.

Our time passed in the camp in the manner I have related. In the mornings I was a constant attendant upon Cheetoo, who rarely allowed me to leave his person during his inspections of the constantly arriving new adventurers; and the evenings closed with feats of strength and trials of skill, in which I sustained the re-

putation I had begun with. I never spent a happier time than the month I was at Nemawur, in every way so gratifying to me, and so consonant to my previously formed wishes.

At last the festival of the Dussera arrived, and it was held with great pomp and show. A grand review of all the assembled adventurers was held, a muster taken, and it was reported that five thousand good horsemen were present; and this number, with their followers, and those indifferently mounted, was augmented to nearly eight thousand—a gallant band, ready to do the bidding of their chief, and to carry war and devastation into the countries before them.

It was planned that we should separate into two bodies soon after passing the Nurbudda penetrate as far as the Kistna river to the south, and, should we find that fordable, then press on as far south as we could, without exposing ourselves to encounters with the regular armies of the Feringhees, which we were assured, although at present inactive, could speedily be sent in pursuit of us. Accordingly, as the morning broke, the whole camp was in motion; and a noble sight it was to see durra after durra defile before their chief, and hurry onwards.

at a rapid pace. Boats had been provided at the Nurbudda, whic we crossed the same day, and took up our ground near the town of Hindia on its southern bank.

At this point the army separated. I remained with my division and Cheetoo, and we pushed on the day after, taking a direction to the westward, so as to come upon the river Taptee, up the valley of which we were to proceed till we should reach the territories of the Rajah of Nagpoor, with whom a treaty had been previously made to allow us a free and unmolested passage through his dominions, on the condition that they were not to be plundered. The other division, under Syud Bheekoo, a leader of note and only second to Cheetoo, took a direction to the eastward, along the bank of the Nurbudda, until they reached the grand road to Nagpoor, by which it was their intention to travel.

Meanwhile we proceeded by rapid marches ; for we were eager to reach the scene of our operations, as our money was running short, and without plunder we should starve. We heard that there was a small detachment of regular troops under Major Fraser watching our movements ; but our spies told us they

were few in number, and we were under no apprehension of an attack from them : it was reported that they did not exceed three hundred men, and we vainly thought they would not dare to face as many thousands. But we had not sufficiently estimated their bravery. We knew they were upwards of fifteen coss distant from us, and what infantry could make that march and attack a body of horse like ours ?

They did however attack us. We had arrived at our ground near a village on the Taptee, and some were cooking their morning meal, others lounging idly about the camp or lying at full length on their saddle-cloths, when the alarm was given that the Feringhees were upon us. The scene of confusion which ensued is indescribable. Men hurried hither and thither ; anything like organization was past all hope ; each, as he could gain his horse, threw himself upon it and fled for his life : not a man stood. In vain I entreated those with me to rally, and make a charge on the small body of red-coats which was now drawn up in line close to our camp, and was pouring volley after volley amongst us with destructive precision. Not a man would hear me, and though my own Thugs and a few of my division swore

they would die if I were to lead them on, I saw no chance of success; and as one or two of my men had fallen near me, we too at length turned our horses' heads and fled. We were not pursued, though there were some horsemen with the infantry, who, had they not been the most arrant cowards, would have charged after and engaged us.

I must say I longed that they should, and I kept my men, nearly a hundred, in a close body, while from time to time we faced about and shook our spears in defiance at the body of horse, about our own number, who however did not stir. We saw the infantry once more put in motion, to take possession of our camp, which, with the thousands of temporary screens from the sun standing here and there, and the fires burning under half-cooked victuals, must have been a welcome resting-place to them after their long march. They must have gained a considerable booty, for many a man threw himself on the bare back of his horse, leaving a well-lined saddle behind him to the victors.

Our surprise and rout was complete, and if the enemy had had a larger body of infantry, or any good cavalry with them to have followed us, we might have bid adieu to all hopes

of future plunder, and most likely should have taken our way to our respective homes and abandoned the expedition. As it was, however, we found we had not lost more than a hundred men, and three days afterwards we were again reunited and in as good spirits as ever.

At length we debouched by almost untrodden paths from the hills to the eastward of Ellich-poor, and from among the dense jungles I had before traversed, after the affair with the Moghulanee. We entered the territories of the Nizam near the river Wurda, which we crossed, and in one march of nearly twenty-five coss reached Oomraotee, which it appeared had been the object of our leader from the first. I have once before described its riches and prosperity, and it was then far richer than it is now.

As we rushed along, more like the flood of a mighty river than aught else, every village on our route was instantly deserted by its inhabitants and left to our mercy. They were one by one ransacked for treasure, and in some of the largest much booty was obtained. I was fortunate in leading the advance-guard on this day, and well do I remember the excitement of the moment, as we passed the last defile in the

hills, and rushed in a body into the plain. Well do I remember waving my sword to my companions,—whose numbers were now swelled to nearly five hundred splendid fellows, often increased by parties from the rear,—as I showed them the broad plains of Berar, and told them that we had unlimited power to plunder as we listed!

Ghuffoor Khan envied me that day; he had been detained with Cheetoo, who remained with the main body, while my own Harawul was increased, in order that I might advance and surround Oomraotee. On we dashed! The few villages we surprised were quickly laid under contribution; and rupees and gold and silver ornaments were tendered, almost without our asking, by their terrified inhabitants. As we proceeded, the news that we were coming had spread through every village; and thousands of the people were seen flying from their homes; while a few only remained in each, with an offering to me, accompanied by entreaties not to burn their villages. Nor did I; though from the pillars of smoke which not long afterwards arose in every direction behind us, I too justly thought the main body had been less merciful than we had. We reached

Oomraotee towards evening. There were but few soldiers to guard this important post, and they had fled on the news of our approach ; we therefore entered the town unchecked and unopposed. How different was my present from my former visit !

I directed my course to the main street, where I knew I should find the principal sahoukars ; and, after stationing parties of my men at each end and at the different outlets, I rode into the middle of the chouke, or market-place, and dismounted among the leading men of the town, who had a carpet spread, and were prepared as they said to do us honour.

But few words of greeting passed, for ours was no cordial visit, and each party was bent on driving the hardest bargain.

“Come, gentlemen,” said I, after I had listened for some time to their vain protestations of poverty and inability to raise a sum adequate to my desires, “this is mere fooling. You have offered a lakh of rupees ; do you think the noble Cheetoo will be satisfied with this ? I swear by the Koran he will not, and you had better at once be reasonable and listen to my words. The whole Lubhur will be here before it is dark, and if any of you will take the trouble to

ascend one of your tall houses, or one of the bastions, you will see how Pindharees mark their progress. Many a fine village behind me has not now a roof or tree standing, and your good town will assuredly share the same fate if you trifle with us; and not only will it be burned, but your property will be handed over to the tender mercies of my men—ay, and your wives and daughters also; so I give you fair warning. You have no force to oppose us; and if you refuse, I am desired to tell you that we shall stay here for some days and amuse ourselves by inspecting the interior of your houses. Go therefore, be wise, consult among yourselves, and before the shadow of this tree has lengthened the measure of my sword, (and I laid it on the ground,) bring me an answer worthy of your name for wisdom, and liberal withal; beyond that time I give you not a moment; your houses are close at hand, and Inshalla! we will help ourselves.”

“Well spoken!” cried all the men who were around me; “but, Meer Sahib, why not help ourselves at once? these stingy merchants can have no idea of the wants of men of honour like us, who have a long journey before us.”

“You shall hear what they say,” replied I;

“meanwhile let us be quiet and orderly, and let none of you interrupt their consultations, or offer violence to any of the townspeople.”

The time had nearly elapsed, and the hilt of my sword was all that remained in the sunlight. The council of the merchants was, from all appearances, as far from a decision as ever, if I might judge from their angry debate, and the unsettled and anxious expressions of their countenances.

Eagerly I watched the increasing shadow, as from time to time I called to them that the period allowed had nearly elapsed; at last the bright hilt of my sword glittered no longer, and I took it up amidst a shout from my men. The merchants saw my action, and again advanced in a body towards me.

“Sit down, Meer Sahib,” said the fattest of them, who appeared to be the chief, “sit down; let us talk over this matter calmly and deliberately. That business is always unsatisfactory which is done in a hurry, and with heated minds.”

“No!” I exclaimed, “I will not: standing as I am, I will hear what you have to say. Remember, when I draw my sword the plunder begins, and though I have some influence over

these brave fellows while they expect a reasonable offer from you, yet the instant they are disappointed my power ends, and I will not answer for any of your lives."

"Come aside with me for a moment," said the chief merchant; "I would speak with you apart; you need fear no treachery from a sahoukar!"

We all laughed heartily. "No, no," said I, "I fear naught, and will come. And do you, my good fellows," I added, turning to my men, "see that none of these worthy persons escape."

"Well," said I, when we had gone a few paces from the group, "what would you say? Be quick; my men are impatient, and your houses and shops are provokingly and temptingly near."

"Listen then," replied he; "you are a leader, and by your conduct doubtless have the influence you appear to have. You have not more than five hundred men with you; we offer you therefore ten thousand rupees as your own share, one thousand to each of your sirdars, and one hundred apiece to your men; this will be nearly a lakh of rupees, and we will take our chance with the main body. What do you say? be quick and tell me, for the money is at

hand, and can be easily distributed before the main body comes up."

I pondered awhile; I knew Cheetoo would make his own terms, and I did not see any harm in getting as much as I could of the spoil before he came. I knew also that he expected ten lakhs, and would get it, or nearly the sum, by fair means or foul. "Listen again," said the sahoukar; "you are in advance; you have naught to do but take your money and push on, and any village before you will shelter you for the night; what will Cheetoo know of it?"

"Nay," said I, "here we remain; after a march of twenty-five coss, we are in no humour to proceed; but I will take my men outside the town on the instant payment of one lakh of rupees;—remember, one third of what we get goes to the chief, and our share after all is not much."

"Agreed," said he; "now come to your men, and persuade them to be quiet: they will not get so much by violence as by treating us well."

We returned to the group we had left, and I unfolded to them the proposition which had been made to me; it was welcomed with a loud shout which made the air ring, and was then succeeded by loud cries for the money.

The sum had evidently been collected previously, for in a few moments a line of men, heavily laden with bags of rupees, issued from a lane close to where we were sitting. Duffa by duffa of the Pindharees, each headed by its own duffadar, was brought up to the spot; each man received his hundred rupees, each leader his thousand, which were stowed away in the capacious bags of their saddles.

“You have not cared for yourself, Meer Sahib,” said Peer Khan; “you have taken nothing.”

“Oh, do not fear for me,” I replied; “I have got my share; the bag does not look large, but it holds gold.”

His eyes brightened. “That is right,” he said; “the others must not know of it.”

“Not a syllable; it is known only to you and myself. Now we must take care these rascals commit no excesses; they seem half in the humour to run riot in the town.”

“They seem content,” he replied; “at least I for one am. By Alla! Meer Sahib, this is rare work; a thousand rupees in a morning’s ride is better than our own profession, though we have been lucky in our time.”

“Choop!” said I, “silence! This is no time

for our secrets. Away with you ! See that the men take up ground before the town. I will remain here with some others, and see what becomes of the place when Cheetoo arrives."

One by one the Pindharees left me, except a few who staid by my desire ; and our business at an end, I sat down and awaited Cheetoo's arrival.

"What do you think he will ask?" said my fat friend to me.

"I know not," I answered ; "but you had better be liberal at once, or he will sack your town, and you know what Pindharees are ; they have few scruples, and some of you may be tortured."

A general shudder ran through the assembly at the thought of the torture, and I saw I had made a hit. "Yes," I continued, "there are such things as korlas, and your fat backs would soon be laid open ; besides there are fellows who are rare hands at tying up fingers and hitting them on the ends, which is not agreeable I should think,—also at mixing compositions for those bags to be tied over your mouths. I have heard of even still worse contrivances to persuade obstinate sahoukars ; but ye are wise men—ye will be warned."

“ Say at once, Meer Sahib,” said another of the merchants who had not yet spoken, “ say what we should offer, and how many Pindharees are there? we have heard there are five thousand.”

“ Somewhat below the mark, Sethjee,” said I; “ we are little under ten thousand, I think; however, you will see the Lubhur, and judge for yourselves. As for the sum, I should say, in the first place, a lakh of rupees for Cheetoo himself—I know he expects as much; then there are three sirdars, Heeroo, Ghuffoor Khan, and Rajun—fifty thousand a piece; then each minor leader and duffadar a thousand, and every good Pindharee a hundred. Say, have I spoken well?”

“ Bhugwan protect us!” cried one and all, “ we are ruined and dead men. Why this would be at least eight lakhs of rupees; where are we to get such a sum? We are ruined, and better kill us at once.”

“ No, no, my good friends, not so,” said I. “ All the world knows that Oomraotee is the richest town in the country, ay richer than Hyderabad itself, and that the money may be counted, not by lakhs, but by crores; so talk not to Cheetoo of your poverty, for he will pre-

sently prove whether you lie or not. Trust me, your safest plan is to offer him a large sum at once, for he has a long journey before him; the men have got nothing since we left Nemawur, and they are hungry and thirsty."

"I tell you all," said the fat sahoukar, "the worthy Meer Sahib speaks the truth. Bhugwan has sent this gurdee (calamity), and we must be resigned to our fate. Better far is it to give the uttermost farthing, than to see our wives and daughters dishonoured before our eyes. I have spoken."

"Good!" cried I; "now you speak like wise men, and I will give you further advice. Cheetoo is a great man, and loves to be paid honour, as indeed is due to him; so also do the other leaders. Now get you pān, uttur, and spices, make up a proper tray of them, bring a few handsome shawls, and as he takes his seat, one of you throw a pair of the best over his shoulders and those of the other chiefs, and lay your nuzzurs before him as you would before Sikundur Jah himself. Inshalla! you will find favour in his sight, and where you would have to pay ten lakhs you will get off with half the sum, and save your town besides."

"By Gunga! 't is well said!" cried several.

“Meer Sahib, you are a kind friend and give good advice; without you we should not have known what to do.”

“Again,” said I, “let none of you have long faces, but all look as if you were rejoiced at his coming. Be none of you alarmed before you have cause. Pay you must, and therefore do it with as good a grace as you can.”

The assembly drank in my words, as I by turns advised and alarmed them, in order to keep up the spirit I had infused; and in this manner the time passed until the dusk of evening, when, by the noise of the tread of many horses' feet and the firing of matchlocks, we were assured of the approach of the main body.

“Now stick by us,” cried the sahoukars as they crowded round me; “you are our friend and must present us: we will not be afraid.” But their words belied them, for the teeth of one and all were chattering with fear, and their cheeks blanched, at the thoughts of confronting the Pindharee chief.

Cheetoo came, and riding into the chouke, surrounded by a crowd of wild-looking figures, the effect of whose appearance was materially increased by the dusk of the evening, his titles were screamed out by a dozen mouths, each

ying with the other in exaggeration of his powers.

The group of sahoukars, headed by me, advanced towards him; and the head merchant, rubbing his forehead on the chief's stirrup, implored him to alight and refresh himself, adding that a zeafut had been prepared, and all were desirous of presenting their nuzzurs.

I seconded the request, and he exclaimed, "Surely I know that voice; whose, in the name of Shitan, is it?"

"That of your slave Ameer Ali," said I.

"Oh, then all is right," he cried; "and thou too hast turned sahoukar. How is this, Meer Sahib?"

"May I be your sacrifice, Nuwab!" said I; "I have but mingled with these worthy persons, because they declared they should be annihilated at the sight of the splendour of your appearance. I did but console them and keep up their spirits till my lord arrived."

"Thou hast done well," said Cheetoo. "Is everything prepared?"

"All," cried the sahoukars; "if the noble Cheetoo will but alight, we are prepared to do him honour."

He alighted, and led by the hand by the chief

merchant, he was conducted into an adjoining house, which belonged to one of the merchants, and where a clean white floor-cloth had been spread, and a musnud placed. The room too was well lighted. Cheetoo took his seat, and looked around him with evident gratification; savage as his countenance was, it now wore a smile of triumph, yet mixed with an expression of extreme pleasure.

“These are civilised people,” said he to Rajun, his favourite, who was close to him. “I little expected this: did you?”

“Indeed no,” said he; “I thought we should have had to cut our way into the town. Depend on it, this is some of Ameer Ali’s doing.”

“Likely enough,” said Cheetoo; “he is a gentleman, and knows how a gentleman ought to be received. But for him it is most probable these swine would have shut themselves up in their houses, and given us the trouble of pulling them out. But see,—what are they about?”

I was nudged by the Sahoukar, who, whispering, implored me to ask Cheetoo to accept their nuzzur. “Five hundred rupees for you if he takes it,” again he whispered as I pre-

tended to hesitate. "Agreed," said I; "I will revenge myself if it is not paid."

"By Gunga! by my Junwa!" again said he most earnestly, "nay, I will double it. Speak for us, good Meer Sahib, are you not our friend and our brother?"

"What are those sons of asses talking to you about?" cried Cheetoo. "Why don't they speak out?"

"Khodawund!" I said, "the terror of your name has preceded you"—and he smiled grimly,—“and your appearance is in every way so imposing and surpassing the accounts these men have heard, that by Alla! they are dumb; and though they would fain lay a nuzzur at your feet, in every way befitting your high rank, they have not words to express their desires, and have begged your slave to inform my lord of them.”

"Kabool, Kabool! I agree," cried Cheetoo; "let the trays be brought. Verily a nuzzur from the sahoukars of Oomraotee ought to be worth seeing."

Fifteen trays were brought in, covered with rich velvet coverings, and set down before the musnud; one by one their covers were removed, and indeed it was a goodly sight! Dates,

pistachio nuts, sweetmeats, and sugar-candy filled four; the rest contained cloths of various kinds, European and Indian, muslins, chintzes, rich turbans, and Benares brocades. It was a nuzzur fit for a prince, and Cheetoo was delighted.

“Now,” said I to the Sahoukar, “this is a happy moment; where are the shawls and the ashruffees? Have a stout heart, and throw the shawls over him, as you would over one of your own tribe at a marriage.”

The Sahoukar took the shawls from an attendant, and putting five ashruffees upon them, advanced to the feet of Cheetoo; and having made the tusleemât, or three obeisances, he presented the gold, and unfolding the shawls, which were very splendid, dexterously enveloped the chief's person in them, and then retreating, stood with his hands folded on his breast in an attitude of respectful humility.

CHAPTER II.

“The sons of fortune, she has sent us forth
To thrive by the keen action of our wits,
Which, backed by fearful dread of our bright swords,
Doth fill our purses speedily.”

CHEETOO was evidently flattered by the distinction with which he had been received, and as he examined the beautiful shawls which now enveloped his person, a grim smile of delight lighted up his coarse features.

“These men have sense,” said he to Ghuffoor Khan, “and are evidently accustomed to the visits of persons of quality. We little expected this civility, and in truth it is most acceptable after our long ride; but they have forgotten you.”

“Not so, noble Cheetoo,” cried the Sahoukar, advancing with several pairs of shawls over his arm ; “we are not forgetful of our distinguished guests ;” and he threw a pair over each of the chiefs, which they received with complacency.

“Let the room be cleared,” cried Cheetoo ; “we have business with these worthy gentlemen, which I have sworn to do before we touch any refreshment.”

It was quickly done, and there only remained our leaders and the sahoukars, who huddled together like wild fowl on the approach of a hawk.

“Come forward,” said Cheetoo to them ; “come and sit near us ; we would speak to you.”

They all arose, and, as they were directed, seated themselves in respectful attitudes on the edge of the musnud.

“Now,” continued Cheetoo, “you are doubtless aware of our object. We want money, and money we will have, by fair means or foul ; if ye are wise, ye will pay me handsomely to be rid of me and my people, who are savage fellows. I desire not to harm you, and on your own heads be it, if any disaster befalls you.

Say, therefore, how much are ye prepared to give?"

"Truly," said the Sahoukar, my friend, who was the spokesman, "we have been duly advised of your Highness's coming; and as a proof that we did not dread you, you see us here, and we have done our poor ability to welcome so distinguished a person. We have also received good counsel from your servant the Meer Sahib; and agreeably to his instructions we have drawn up a list of a few trifles and some ready money which we are desirous of laying at the feet of your Highness." And the Sahoukar handed to him a paper written in Persian.

"This is unintelligible to me, for I am no moonshee: but can any of you read, brothers?" asked Cheetoo of the other leaders.

"Not a word, not a letter," cried one and all; "none of us know one letter from another."

"I can send for a moonshee," said the Sahoukar; "one is in attendance."

"If I am permitted," said I, "I will read the list: I may be able to make it out."

"Ha! thou art a clerk as well as a good

soldier," cried Cheetoo, laughing. "Well, take the paper, and let us hear our good fortune."

"First then," said I, after I had glanced over the document, "this paper sets forth, that the sahoukars and others of the market-town of Oomraotee, in council assembled, having heard of the near approach of the mighty Cheetoo and his army, and being desirous of approaching his feet with a small tribute of respect, have put down the following articles and sums of ready money, which are prepared and ready for his acceptance,—on no condition save that they may find favour in his sight, and be the humble means of insuring his clemency to others."

"Good!" said Cheetoo. "Now get thee to the marrow of the matter as speedily as may be, for my stomach craves food, and I doubt not these worthy gentlemen's families have prepared a repast for me."

"It is ready, noble Cheetoo," cried the Sahoukar; "and if the order is given, it will be set out; but the food of us poor Hindoos would be tasteless to my lord, and therefore we have had the repast cooked by the best Bawurchees of the town."

"Silence!" cried the chief; "speak when

you are allowed to do so: we are in no humour to be interrupted."

The Sahoukar shrank back intimidated, and raising my voice I proceeded.

"The first item, Protector of the Poor!" cried I, "is a sum of fifty thousand rupees for yourself."

"Is that all?" cried he, his brow contracting.

"Stay," said I; "more follows. 'A tray of choice jewels, gold, and silver, valued at fifteen thousand rupees, and three trays of shawls and brocades for my lord's Muhal, valued at ten thousand rupees: in all, seventy-five thousand rupees. Secondly, a sum of ten thousand rupees to each leader of rank, of whom we learn from the worthy Syud, Ameer Ali, there are three: a tray of jewels to each, of five thousand rupees, and three trays, each valued at five thousand more; in all, twenty thousand rupees each.'"

"Go on!" cried Cheetoo; "you have not done yet, I suppose?"

"No," said I, glancing down the paper; "there is more following. 'Thirdly, a sum of one thousand rupees to each duffadar: we are uninformed of their number, but we have supposed thirty.'"

“Good!” cried Cheetoo; “what more?”

“‘Fourthly, the sum of fifty rupees to each deserving person, to be given at the discretion of the mighty Cheetoo; by report we hear there are four thousand. Also food, grain, and forage for as many days as the army may remain with us.’ This is all,” said I; “what are my lord’s orders?”

“The list is well enough,” said Cheetoo; “but they are wrong in some particulars: first, there are fifty duffadars, are there not, Ghuffoor Khan?”

“There are,” he replied; “I told them off myself.”

“Put that down, Meer Sahib,” said Cheetoo. “Again, there are five thousand good Pindharees; am I not right?”

“True again,” cried all the leaders; “were they not counted at Nemawur?”

This was a lie; there were hardly four thousand, for nearly half the lubhur had gone off in a different direction from the Nurbudda; but it signified little; for Cheetoo, I knew, was determined to make the best terms he could with the sahoukars.

“Put down five thousand,” said Cheetoo; “and now see how much you have got.”

I hastily arranged the amount, and read the paper to him. "First," said I, "there is your Highness's share, seventy-five thousand rupees; secondly, on account of the leaders, sixty-thousand rupees; then the fifty duffadars, each man a thousand, fifty thousand rupees; lastly, five thousand men, each forty, two hundred thousand. And the sum of the whole is three lakhs and eighty-five thousand rupees."

"And," said Cheetoo to Ghuffoor Khan, "the horses' shoes must be worn out, I think? we require new ones."

"Certainly," cried the Khan, with a merry grin.

"Put down fifteen thousand rupees for the horse-shoes, this, Meer Sahib, will make the sum an even four lakhs; and gentlemen," continued he to the sahoukars, "I must trouble you to pay with as little delay as possible, or we must help ourselves."

There was a hurried conference for a few moments among the sahoukars, and a few angry words passed among them; but they were wise; my fat friend rose, and making a lowly obeisance, declared the money was at hand, and should be brought immediately.

"Good!" cried Cheetoo; "now let me have

my dinner, and do you all see that the duffadars are present at this house by tomorrow's dawn, to receive their shares and those of their men. The lubhur must move on, for after this kind reception, I would not have my friends the sahoukars exposed to the chance of being plundered by my lawless bands."

The chiefs separated, and I was preparing to leave the room with them, when Cheetoo called me back; "Come and take your dinner with me," said he; "I doubt not your friends the sahoukars have prepared enough for us two."

I obeyed the order, and seated myself at the edge of the musnud. The dinner was soon brought, and a choice repast it was. We did justice to it, for in truth our travel had sharpened our appetites. These satisfied, and inhaling the fragrant smoke of our pipes, Cheetoo asked me how I had managed to bring about so advantageous a reception as he had met with.

I related the whole to him, suppressing however the fact that I had secured for myself so large a sum as ten thousand rupees; for had I disclosed that, he would presently have helped himself to half of it at least. Peer Khan was

the only person who knew of it, and to him alone was I determined to entrust it.

He was delighted; he had, I knew, determined to raise a large sum, and I had purposely exaggerated his probable demand to the sahoukars; this, and my threats and hints of the place being given up to plunder on the least demur on their parts of paying handsomely, had been successful.

“You see, Meer Sahib,” said he, “by your excellent conduct I have secured, first, seventy-five thousand rupees; and what is over, after every proper Pindharee has got his forty rupees, will make the sum pretty near a lakh; which is, you will say, a good beginning.”

“May your prosperity increase, noble Chee-too,” said I; “if your slave can help you to a few more sums like the present, he will only feel himself too happy, and too honoured by distinction like the present. For the men I had with me, I made the same terms as you have accepted for the whole, and they were well satisfied.”

“And for yourself, Meer Sahib?”

“I have not got much,” said I; “perhaps I might have arrogated to myself the distinction

of one of the leaders, but I refrained: they gave me five thousand rupees however, and I am satisfied."

"Nay," said Cheetoo; "it was too little, my friend, and I advise you to get as much as you can next time. And as you have behaved so well in this instance at the head of the advance-party, I will give it into your command in future, and must satisfy Ghuffoor Khan as well as I can; he is a good soldier, but a thick-headed fellow, who is always for helping himself, and setting fire to towns and villages, by which we seldom get half as much, especially from these rich places, as we could do by a little management and a few soft words."

"May your condescension increase, Nuwab!" cried I; "your servant, Inshalla! will never disappoint you."

I took leave of him soon afterwards, and joined the sahoukars, who were sitting below counting the money, which lay in large heaps on the floor.

They received me joyfully, and expressed in forcible language how much they were indebted to me for my active interference in their behalf. They would have pressed on me the five

hundred rupees they had promised when I presented them to Cheetoo, but I refused it.

“No,” said I; “if I have done you service, and I think I have, I will not sell my good offices. You have dealt as well by me as I have by you, so the balance is even; all I pray of you is, to let me have my money in gold bars, which I can easily conceal, except a few hundred rupees for present expenses.”

“It is granted,” said the Sahoukar; and I had shortly afterwards the gold in my possession; and taking a few of the sahoukar’s men to guard me, I bent my way to the camp, the bright fires of which sparkled through the darkness on the plain beyond the town, revealing many a wild group which huddled round them to warm themselves from the effects of the almost chilling night breeze. I was soon at my little tent, which consisted of a cloth stretched over three spears, two of which were stuck into the ground, and another tied across them as a ridge pole; and assisted by Peer Khan, I put the gold into the bags I had had made in the flaps of my saddle, and sewed them over. I was ten thousand rupees richer in one night!

“This is grand work,” said Peer Khan;

“here we have had no trouble; and if we go on at this rate, we shall return far richer than after the toil and risk of a hundred Thuggee expeditions.

“I am to have the advance-guard always,” said I; “and it shall be my own fault if we do not always secure a good share; for my own part, I have forsworn Thuggee, as long as there is a Pindharee chief to erect his standard.”

“And we will all follow you,” he replied; “Motee and the others are delighted with their success, and are in high spirits: there is not one of them but has got a good share of today’s work, for we stuck near you, and were bribed well to use our influence with you; they thought us all duffadars, and you know Mottee and myself shared as such.”

“It shall not be my fault,” said I, “if you are not all duffadars in reality before long. Let the men make themselves active, and dress handsomely: you are all well mounted, and will catch the eye of the chief.”

By dawn the next morning I was with Cheetoo. The sahoukars had collected the whole of the money, by subscriptions among themselves and collections from the town; and the whole was distributed fairly, I must say,

among the Pindharees. Each duffadar bore away the share of his duffa, and they knew too well the risk they would run if they defrauded any man of his just due.

A few hours elapsed, and after a hurried meal, every man was on his horse, and the Lubhur departed to seek fresh plunder in the country before them. Yet before he set out, Cheetoo promised, in consequence of the ready payment of the sum he received, that in every future expedition he might undertake, the town of Oomraotee should be exempted from contributions; and he kept his word. Oomraotee was never again plundered, and a large body of troops, which were stationed there afterwards, effectually deterred small and straggling parties from surprising it as we had done.

Onwards we dashed! I, at the head of my band, who had now implicit confidence in me, caracoled along on my gallant horse, with a heart as light and happy as the unlimited freedom of action I possessed could make it. No thought of care intruded, and I was spared the pain of seeing the villages we passed through (from each of which we levied as much as we could, which was instantly laden on the Shootur camels that accompanied us,) burned or

plundered, and the inoffensive inhabitants subjected to the cruel tortures of the men in the rear, who were often disappointed of booty.

We halted at Karinjah; a few soldiers who were in the town made a feeble defence, and wounded a few of my men as we rushed into the place; but they were soon killed or dispersed; and, as a warning to other villages, it was given up to sack and ruin. I could never bear the sight of wanton cruelty, and I repaired to my place in the camp; shortly afterwards I could see, from the bright blaze which rose from different parts of the village almost simultaneously against the clear gray evening sky, that it was doomed to destruction. Rapidly the fire spread, while the shouts of the Pindharees engaged in their horrid work, and the screams of the inhabitants—those of the women were fearfully shrill and distinct—made a fit accompaniment. But it was a work in which the Pindharees delighted; order, which never existed save when there was no excitement, was completely at an end, and any attempt to have checked the mad riot which was going on would have been attended most likely with death to the interferer. My own Thugs, too, sat around me, for a Thug is not savage,

and they had no inclination to join in the excesses.

We sat in silence, but our attention was soon arrested by the figure of a man dragging along a girl, who resisted to the utmost of her power, but who was evidently nearly exhausted. I rushed forward to her rescue, and my eyes fell on the person of Ghuffoor Khan, his savage features exaggerated in their ferocious expression by lust and the scene he had been engaged in.

“Ha!” cried he, “Meer Sahib, is that you? here have I been working like a true Pindharee, and have brought off something worth having; look at her, man! is she not a Peri? a Hoori? The fool, her mother, must needs oppose me when I got into their house, but I silenced her with a thrust of my sword, and lo! here is her fair daughter, a worthy mate for a prince. Speak, my pretty one, art not thou honoured at the prospect of the embraces of Ghuffoor Khan?”

By Alla! Sahib, I could have killed him, and 't would have been an easy matter to have done so, as he stood unprepared. I had half drawn my sword from its scabbard, but I returned it: I made an inward determination as to his fate, and I kept it. I vainly endeavoured to induce him to give up the girl and let her

go, but he laughed in my face, and dragged her off. She would fain have fled from him, and attempted to do so, but he pursued and caught her, for her tender feet were cut by the rough ground, and I lost sight of them both in the quickly closing darkness. Miserable girl! she was a Brahmin's daughter, and was spared the degradation of seeing the light of another day, and the misery of returning to her desolate home polluted and an outcast. Ghuffoor Khan told me in the morning, with a hellish laugh, that he had murdered her, as she tried to possess herself of his dagger, to plunge it into her own heart. "I spared her the trouble," he said.

Gradually the fire lessened in its fury, as there remained but few houses unconsumed, but the Pindharees were still at their wild and horrible work, as the shrieks borne to us on the night wind too well testified. I had heard that these excesses were sometimes committed, but I had formed no idea of their terrible reality. A thousand times I formed the resolution to quit the Lubhur and return to my home; but again the thought, that a few straggling horsemen, who could give no proper account of themselves, would be immediately taken for Pind-

harees, and sacrificed by the now infuriated people of the country,—this, and, I must add, a restless desire for further adventures, caused me to dismiss it from my mind. It began to rain too, and we all huddled together in my little tent, and passed a weary night, till the morning broke. Then we were again in motion, and the ill-fated town of Karinjah, now a heap of smouldering ruins, was soon far behind us.

We passed Mungrool ; and beyond the town, now in the broad daylight, I had an opportunity of seeing the spot where my first victim had fallen. I had thought that the place where he fell was in a large and dense jungle, so at least it appeared that night in the moonlight,—but it was not so ; the rivulet was the same as when we had passed it, and I stood once more on the very spot where the sahoukar had fallen ! A thin belt of bushes fringed the stream, and Peer Khan pointed with a significant gesture a little higher up than the place at which we crossed. It was the *bhil* where they were buried, and it now seemed a fearfully insecure spot for the concealment of our victims,—so close to the road, and apparently so thinly screened from observation. Yet

many years had now passed since they were deposited in their last resting-place, and a succession of rainy seasons had either washed away their remains, or covered them still deeper with sand.

We passed the spot too where our bands had encamped and separated; and before me was now a new country, though it little differed in character from that we had already traversed.

We halted at Basim, and I greatly feared a repetition of the scenes of the past night; but the men were, to my astonishment, quiet and orderly; and a handsome contribution levied in the town in all probability saved it. From hence, in five marches, we reached Nandair on the Godavery, a rich town, and one which promised as large a supply to our army as we had got at Oomraotee. We had feared the news of our approach would have reached it, and that the sahoukars and wealthy inhabitants would have fled; but it was not so: they were completely surprised and at our mercy, for not a single soldier worth mentioning was there to guard the place. A few there certainly were, who shut themselves up in an old fort which overhangs the river and commands the ford;

but they kept within the walls, only firing a matchlock-shot or two whenever any of our marauders approached too near; we did not molest them, but set ourselves to work to levy as large a sum as possible.

As before, the advance-guard had been entrusted to me, and I pursued the same system I had done at Oomraotee.

I will not weary you with a repetition of almost the same tale; suffice it to say, that one lakh and a half of rupees were collected and paid to the army, and I got for my own share nearly three thousand rupees, some jewels, and a pair of shawls. The town was not destroyed; indeed that would have been impossible, as the houses were substantial ones, with terraced roofs; but the suburbs suffered, and the huts of the unfortunate weavers were sacked for the fine cloths for which the place is famous,—nor in vain, for half the army the next day appeared in new turbans and waist-bands.

The river was not fordable, and there was but one boat; we therefore pushed along the northern bank, till we reached Gunga Khair, where we were told there were boats and a more convenient ferry: nor were we disappointed. We crossed with ease during the day

on which we arrived opposite the place, the men swimming their horses across, and the plunder and baggage being brought over by the boats. A few hundred men attempted to defend the town, but it was carried by forcing open the gate, and plundered. We lost some of our men, and I was grazed on the leg by a bullet, and disabled from taking any active part in the sack of the place. Peer Khan and Motee were however not idle, and brought a goodly heap of jewels and coin, to swell the general stock.

From hence we penetrated southward. Beeder, Bhalkee, the fine and flourishing town of Hoomnabad, (a second Oomraotee,) were severally plundered, or laid under heavy contributions; while every village which lay in our route was sacked, and too often burned and destroyed. From Hoomnabad I led three hundred men to Kullianee, a few coss distant; but we found the alarm had been given, and that all the rich inhabitants had taken refuge in the fort, which is a very strong one, and to us was impregnable. Such was the dread we inspired, however, that the defenders of it remained quietly within it, and allowed us to keep quiet possession of the town till the

next morning, when we again rejoined the main body.

We descended by a pass in the hills to the village of Chincholee, which was of course plundered, and we followed a direct southwardly route, burning and plundering every place in our way, till the broad and deep stream of the Krishna effectually opposed our further progress. Here the Lubhur halted for some days ; forage was plentiful, every one was loaded with money, and we enjoyed ourselves in our encampment as true Pindharees. Dancing-girls were seized from all parts of the surrounding country, though no violence was ever offered to them, and they amused us with their songs and performances, and left us when we were again put in motion, well satisfied and well rewarded, and regretting that they could not accompany us.

Cheetoo was wrong to have halted, for the alarm that Pindharees were out had flown through the country, and in our march towards Koolburgah we got no plunder worth mentioning. Koolburgah we found garrisoned and prepared for our reception ; so relinquishing our designs upon Sholapoor and the rich towns of Barsee and Wyrag, we struck off in the direc-

tion of Bheer, Pyetun and Aurungabad, hoping to surprise the latter, though we feared it would be well garrisoned.

But I was determined to surprise Barsee and Wyrag if I could, and I laid my proposals for the expedition before Cheetoo. He readily acceded to my request, at which Ghuffoor Khan was extremely savage; and taking with me three hundred men, the best I could select, and dividing them into duffas under my own Thugs, I left the main body at the town of Allund, and dashed on towards Toljapoor, from whence there is a pass into the low country.

Toljapoor has little to recommend it but the temple of Bhowanee, which is a place of pilgrimage; and though I knew there were hoards of jewels in the possession of the Brahmins, yet, as many of my men were Hindoos, they would not hear of the temples being sacked, and I was forced to content myself with levying a few thousand rupees from the inhabitants.

Wyrag was our next aim, and we were successful. Our force was supposed to be a Risala of Mahratta horse who were known to be in the district, and we were allowed to enter the town unopposed. We sacked it, and got a large booty, for there was no time for a propo-

sal of contribution; indeed I thought not of that alternative, nor could I restrain my men after their long march. Yet they were not cruel, nor did I hear of any of them having tortured any one, and the inhabitants gave up enough of their valuables to satisfy them easily. Here we heard that the Risala we had been mistaken for was at Barsee, and as that place lay in our direct road to Bheer, where we were to join the main body, I was obliged to give up my intention of proceeding through it; there was also a large body of the Nizam's horse at Puréndah, and I feared that we might be cut off. An instant return by the road we had come was our only alternative; and after a few hours' rest we were again in our saddles, and travelling as fast as we could urge our horses towards Toljapoor. Nobly did my gallant horse carry me that day: most of the men dosed theirs with opium to insure their bottom, but my good charger needed it not, and he was almost as fresh when we again reached Toljapoor, as when he had left it.

Here we rested a day to refresh ourselves, and after that, pushing on, we overtook the main body at Bheer, where they were encamped. I had been baffled in part of my design, yet

Cheetoo received with great complacency ten thousand rupees in money, and nearly the same amount in jewels, which I presented to him in full durbar as the results of my enterprise; for this he invested me with a dress of honour, and presented me with a good horse from among his own.

CHAPTER III.

RELATES HOW, ENCOURAGED BY HIS SUCCESS, CHEETOO PLANS ANOTHER EXPEDITION ON A LARGER SCALE, AND HOW AMEER ALI JOINED IT.

BHEER was sacked, and given up to rapine and excess for two whole days; and when we left it scarcely a rag remained to the miserable inhabitants. It was piteous to see them raking together a few posts of wood, many of them half burned, and erecting wretched hovels, which they covered with green boughs, to screen themselves from the cold winds of the night. They suffered the ravage of their town passively, for there were no soldiers to protect it; and what could they have done against a well-armed and savage horde like ours?

Pyetun, on the Godavery, shared the same fate; and though many of the rich inhabitants

had fled for refuge to Aurungabad, yet enough remained for our purpose. You know, perhaps, that this place is celebrated for a manufacture of brocaded muslins, only inferior to those of Benares; and at that time there was an active demand for them, to supply the courts of Poona and Hyderabad: you may judge, therefore, of the value of the plunder we got; Cheetoo's camels and elephants were laden to the utmost. None of us fared badly; and our own stock was now so large of one valuable or another, that I hardly thought we should have been enabled to carry it with us. I need not follow our track much further with minuteness; suffice it therefore to say, that we passed the Adjuntah Ghat, not however without being closely pressed by some troops of the Feringhees: but we eluded them by a rapid march or two, and after a vain attempt on Boorhanpoor, we struck off to the right by the valley of the Taptee, and in a few days were safely returned to the camp at Nemawur.

In little more than three months we had traversed the richest part of the broad territory of the Nizam; we had eluded his troops and those of the Feringhees, and laughed at their beards; we had plundered his richest towns with impu-

nity, and we had returned, with scarcely the loss of a man, laden with plunder of enormous value. So rich was it, that the sahoukars of Nemawur, after purchasing all they could from us, were unable to find further funds to buy up the whole; and merchants from Oojein and Indoor, and all the neighbouring large cities, were sent for to our rich market.

In due time all had been purchased, and every man prepared to return as quickly as he could to his home, with the proceeds of his booty. I need not say how my heart bounded at the prospect of again seeing mine, and laying at my Azima's feet the wealth I had acquired, nor the pleasure she would experience in hearing me recount the wild adventures I had gone through. I accordingly purchased all the gold I could, as also did my men, and hiring two swift camels, I loaded them with it and the valuable cloths we had received for our own use, and was ready for a rapid march to Jhalone when I could receive my dismissal from Cheetoo's durbar. This it was not an easy matter to attain, for I had served the chief faithfully, he had confidence in my address and activity, and was loath to part with me, fearing I would not return to his standard.

The day I went to take leave he would not receive my parting gift, nor give me the usual ceremonial return of Uttur and Pan on my departure; and I sat in the durbar in gloomy thought, that perhaps treachery was intended towards me—a poor return for my exertions. But I was wrong: he called me towards him when but few remained, and appointing a late hour in the night for an interview and private conversation, desired me to be punctual, for that he had matters of importance to reveal to me.

I returned to my abode in better hope, yet still suspecting, and almost inclined to follow the advice of Peer Khan and the rest, who would fain have had me fly, as the only means of preserving our money. I did not however entirely mistrust Cheetoo; but I determined, if he put me off with further words, and caused me more delay, that I would at once leave him in the best way I could.

I accordingly attended at the hour appointed, which was past midnight. I found the chief alone. I had never before been so honoured as to be admitted to an entirely private conference, though I had been allowed a seat in his councils, and my suggestions had been followed on

more than one occasion. I could not divine what was to ensue.

“Be seated, Syud,” said Cheetoo; “I have much to say to thee.”

“Speak on, Nuwab,” I replied; “your words are sweet to your servant, and they will fall on ears which will convey their meaning to a heart devoted to your service.”

“Listen then,” said he. “But first I will ask you what you thought the object of the last expedition to be?”

“Its object!” cried I. “Why, I suppose, only to get as much money as you could for yourself and your men, so as to be ready to take advantage of the war which sooner or later must ensue between the Mahrattas and the Feringhees—may their race be accursed! I never could divine a deeper object, though I have thought upon the subject myself, and heard many opinions expressed by others.”

“You are partly right,” said he, “but not entirely; now you shall hear the whole, and what my further projects are.”

I settled myself into an attitude of profound attention, and drank in his words as he proceeded.

“You have had a watchful eye upon the

times, Meer Sahib, and I expected it from you. You may have heard that Tippoo Sultan—on whose memory be peace!—would fain have enlisted the Nizam and the whole of the Mahrattas in one confederacy to overthrow and extirpate the Feringhees. Had his plans been successful he would have done it; but, a curse on his avarice! he had an under-plot to divide the Nizam's territories with the Mahrattas, which was discovered, Alla only knows how; and a curse on the luck of the Feringhees, who overthrew the only power which, while it lasted, upheld the dignity of the Moslem's faith. Tippoo is gone, and his power. Perhaps you are not aware that at this moment, though Holkar is sorely disabled from what he was, and Sindia has made a base league of passiveness with the Feringhees, a deep confederacy exists among the Mahratta states, and particularly between those of Poona and Nagpoor, to rise simultaneously and declare war against the usurping and never-satisfied Europeans. Sikundur Jah will join with the Feringhees; not that he can do much, for his army is miserable, and his leaders have neither skill nor bravery, but still he will befriend them to the utmost, and his dominions are open to the passage and sub-

sistence of their troops, and in them positions can be taken up which will sorely harass the future operations of the Mahratta leaders. My last expedition was therefore intended (and by the favour of Alla it has succeeded) to impoverish Sikundur Jah's country, to keep the people in a constant state of alarm, and, need I add, to fill our own purses.

“Now listen again. To effect my purpose thoroughly, and to distract the attention of the Europeans from the preparations of the Mahrattas, these expeditions must be rapid in succession to have their due effect: one half of the Huzoor's dominions have been sacked, and the other half remains;—Inshalla! it shall share the same fate. The Feringhees will be kept in a perpetual state of alarm; they will follow us vainly from place to place, but I fear them not. I have laughed at their beards once, and will do so again. They shall know who Cheetoo Pindharee is, and to their cost. Not only shall the cowardly Nizam suffer, but the rich provinces of the Feringhees shall be wasted. I will cross the Krishna; the river will be fordable, or nearly so; and the whole of the provinces which are not overrun by their troops shall be prostrated before my power. This will

exhaust their resources and paralyse their efforts. The Mahrattas will then rise to a man: I will join them; for I have been promised a high command in their armies, and territories after their conquest; and we will rise, Meer Sahib—yes, *we*, I say, for these stirring times are the fit ones for such as myself and you—Inshalla! we will take advantage of them, and win fame for ourselves which posterity shall wonder at.”

“It is a rare plan,” said I, “and a deep one, while the game seems easy to play. I can find no fault with it; but will not the Feringhees be prepared for us, and meet us wherever we show our faces?”

“No!” cried he vehemently, “they will not! cunning as they are, I will be before them in the field. They now think that, glutted with plunder, we shall remain quietly here, and be fools enough to wait for another Dussera before we are again on the move; but they are wrong to a man: and here has lain the cause of my apparent secrecy with you. I could not proclaim it in my durbar that I had planned another expedition; some prating fool would have blabbed of it at his home, and the news would have flown over the country in a week.

No! I have kept it secret, except from a few, and they are my chief leaders, every one of whom has a thousand men at his back. Hear me,—I am determined, by the favour of Alla, to move hence at the head of a larger army than the last has been, in a space of time under two months. Say, will you come? I will give you the command of a thousand horse, for I love you, and depend upon you. Can you return from Jhalone in that time? I have no wish to detain you here; a man's home is dear to him wherever it is, and you are right to return to it: yet tell me that you will join me within two months, and what I have promised I will perform."

"I will," cried I; "may your condescension increase, your slave will take advantage of your bounty. In less than two months, though I travel night and day, I will come, and bring more men with me."

"The more the better," said Cheetoo. "Take the best horse from my stable if you wish it, he cannot be in better hands than your own; and as you will want camels, take too as many as you require from my own fleet ones: load them lightly and they will keep up with you. And now go—I am weary in mind and body, and

need repose ; you, I doubt not, will start with the morning's dawn. Go, and may peace be with you !”

I left him, and joyfully rejoined my associates. I knew the secret was safe with them ; and as I unfolded the deep plan to them, they were lost in wonder and admiration at Cheetoo's sagacity and forethought. To a man they swore to join me, and to follow my fortunes through good or ill. Merrily we set off the next morning, and quickly miles and miles of road disappeared under the hoofs of our fleet and hardy steeds. In far less time than it had taken us to come, we had reached Jhalone, unlooked for and unexpected, and with a joyful bound I crossed my own threshold, and was again clasped in the embrace of my Azima. What words can paint our joy ? I cannot describe it ; my heart was too full for utterance, as I was again seated in my own zenana, and beheld the frolics and gambols of my beauteous child. My father too, he rejoiced with me ; but there was an eye of evil upon us ; our cup of joy was fated to be no sooner filled to the brim, than to be dashed from our lips. That eye was the Rajah's : but more of that hereafter.

Not that I neglected him ; the prices of his

horses were duly paid, and I presented to him a valuable string of pearls, with some beautiful cloths, the plunder of Pyetun, and a tray of fifty-one gold pieces. One would have thought he would have been satisfied, but it was not so:—yet he was all smiles and congratulations. I was invested with a dress of honour, and encouraged privately, (for he secretly knew of the new enterprise,) to further exertions, and cheered on by him to win distinction and renown. Base liar and murderer! he deceived me; but who could have guessed his thoughts?

As soon as I could, I dispatched Peer Khan and Motee with two of the others in various directions, to offer terms of employment and the prospect of booty to as many Thugs as they knew to be good men and good horsemen; the latter was a qualification in which but few Thugs excelled: nevertheless, in the space of ten days they returned with twelve others, some of whom I knew, and all were stated to be resolute men, well acquainted with the use of their weapons. They were easily provided with horses from the Rajah's stables, as the first had been, for he had received more than double their value, and would now have risked his whole stud on the same terms. I examined their arms,

and rejected such as were defective, supplying them with others. Our saddles were newly stuffed, and every preparation which our experience could suggest was made for even a longer and more arduous enterprise than that from which we had just returned.

But little time now remained to me to enjoy the quiet peacefulness of my home, and now that I was there, I would fain have never again left it. Wealth I had in abundance, enough for many years; and I was in a situation from which I could have risen to a high civil employment, in the management of revenue in the Rajah's country. Still the desire for adventure was not blunted, and above all, the promise I had given to Cheetoo could not be evaded or neglected; and had he not promised me the command of a thousand men? This had many charms in my sight; and should his plans succeed, to what rank might I not rise by my exertions, when the Mahrattas overthrew the Europeans and the Nizam, and their broad dominions were portioned out to the government of their faithful leaders! These thoughts urged me to a speedy departure, and tearing myself from my wife I left the town, with the blessings of my father and the apparent goodwill of the

Rajah, who wished me every success, and presented me with a valuable sword as a mark of his especial favour.

I was soon again with Cheetoo, who received me with great joy: I found him busied with the large preparations he was making for his intended expedition. By this time the news of the immense booty he had collected in his first expedition had spread through all lands far and near; thousands had flocked to Nemawur, to offer themselves to his service, in the hope that they might partake in the next; and hundreds were arriving daily, to swell the numbers of the already assembled multitude. A difficult task it was to allot the various tribes and individuals to the command of the different leaders; and my aid was asked by Cheetoo, and as readily given, to organize as far as we could the heterogeneous mass.

It was no easy task, for the men would have preferred acting independently, and on their own account; but this did not suit Cheetoo's intentions, as his irruption, though for the sole purpose of ravage and plunder, was to be of a more regular kind than the preceding. Ghuffoor Khan was there in all his savageness, looking forward to the burning of towns and the

torture of inoffensive persons, with a desire which had received additional zest from his previous experience. We were on civil terms, but I had never forgotten that night at Karinjah, and the memory of the wretched Hindoo girl, and her sufferings and murder. In this expedition I felt assured that he would give no check to his passions; and I only waited a favourable opportunity to arrest his career of crime by a stroke of retributive justice; until this arrived, I was determined to cultivate his acquaintance as closely as possible, in order that he might be the more surely my own.

Our preparations were now made; upwards of ten thousand good horse were already enrolled, and the number of their followers was beyond computation; how they existed on their own resources I know not, but they did so, and right merrily too, for our camp was one scene of revelry and enjoyment. As a final ceremony, Cheetoo held a general durbar, at which all the chiefs and leaders were present: he disclosed his plan of operations, which was, to penetrate through the territories of the Rajah of Nagpoor to the south-eastward, and passing through the forests and jungles of Gondwana, to pour his forces on the almost unprotected provinces

north of Masulipatam; from thence to cross the Krishna, to ravage the country as far as Kurnool, and to return from thence in the best way we could to Nemawur. This plan of operations was received with glad shouts by the assembly, the army outside the tent took them up, and the air was rent with cries of exultation. It was a spirit-stirring moment, all partook of the joy, and the chiefs eagerly besought Cheetoo to lose no time in his departure. Nor did he. Prepared as the whole were to move at a moment's warning, the order was given that the army should cross the Nurbudda the next day.

CHAPTER IV.

Duke.—“ I am sorry for thee ; thou art come to answer
A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch
Incapable of pity, void and empty
From any shew of mercy.”

MERCHANT OF VENICE, *Act iv. Sc. 1.*

AT the head of the advance, which consisted of my thousand splendid horsemen, I was the first to cross the river, now fordable, and we encamped on its further bank, in the same spot we had occupied scarcely five months before, almost doubled in numbers, and with the prospect of a brilliant foray before us. I shall not speak of how we traversed the Rajah of Nag-poor's territories, or penetrated through jungles and forests which till now had hardly ever been traversed by armies. We suffered often sad straits for the want of water, but all bore up nobly ; and at last our horde rushed upon

the fertile plains of the northern Circars, and everything fell before it. Mercy was shown to none. Our army spread itself over a tract of country many miles in breadth, and every village in its route was sacked and reduced to ashes.

On we rushed, at the rate of ten and fifteen coss daily; neither mountains nor rivers impeded us: in the language of hyperbole, we devoured the former and drank up the latter. Troops there were none to oppose us, and if there had been any, they would have been trampled under the feet of our victorious squadrons. Yet we had no disposition to fight; it was no part of our plan. If we heard of resistance likely to be offered, we diverged from the spot, for what would have been the use of exposing ourselves to encounters, in which, though sure of victory, we should have lost many of our men and crippled our future operations?

After some days we reached Guntoor, where we knew there was a large treasure collected, the revenue of the province we had desolated. To gain this was an object on which Cheetoo had set his heart, as he had heard it amounted to many lakhs of rupees, and it belonged to the detested Europeans. My men rushed with

yells more like those of demons than men upon the devoted town. To restrain them would have been vain, and I did not attempt it. It was thoroughly sacked in the presence of the British officers, who confined themselves to a building in which was the treasure; and I must say they defended their charge nobly. No Pindharee could show himself near the spot without being a target for a volley of musquetry; and though I importuned Cheetoo to allow me to storm the building at the head of my Risala, he would not hear of it. He had been deceived, he said, about there being troops to defend it; and though I always thought there were but few, yet he exaggerated their numbers, and relinquished his determination.

In revenge, however, for our disappointment, we plundered the houses of the officers, broke all their furniture, and set fire to many of them afterwards, in the hope that this would draw them from their post, and expose them to the charge of the horse. They were too wise however to venture forth, and reluctantly we left the place from which we had promised ourselves so large a booty; not, however, that what we did get was inconsiderable, though many were disappointed.

I was not so. I had, with my own Thugs, seized upon a respectable looking house, which we defended against the Pindharees who attempted to enter, and we despoiled its inmates, a large family of rich Hindoos, of all their wealth and ornaments, to the amount of nearly thirty thousand rupees. We did it too without torture, for I never permitted it, though we were obliged to use threats in abundance.

Laden with our spoil we left the town in the afternoon, and by night the straggling army was again encamped at a distance of nearly ten coss from it, secure against any pursuit.

We crossed the Krishna, and penetrated nearly as far as Kurpah, where we heard there was more treasure belonging to the English government. But we were disappointed in this also. The officers who guarded it were on the alert, and the station was guarded by troops; we therefore avoided any collision with them, and directed our course towards Kurnool. Here also we were beaten off; but we crossed the river, and again entered the Nizam's territory, closely pursued by a body of English cavalry, who however did not cross after us. A consultation was now held, and it was determined that our Lubhur should separate into three bo-

dies, both for the sake of destroying and ravaging a larger tract of country than we could do united, and of more easily evading the troops which now watched our movements in every direction. One body therefore took a western course along the banks of the river, another an eastern one, and a third a middle course.

That which took the eastern road was the one with which Cheetoo remained, and with it were Ghuffoor Khan and myself. We were to pass through the country to the eastward of Hyderabad, and regain the Nagpoor territories by the great north road through Nirmul. I was now the sole companion of Ghuffoor Khan; so long as the other leaders remained, he was mostly in their company, but now their absence drew us together, and I may almost say that we lived in the same tent, if tent it could be called, which served to shelter us from the excessive heat of the weather. Need I mention that I was a constant witness to his cruelties? They were of every-day occurrence, and to show you the man's nature, I shall relate one, as a specimen of thousands of a similar kind that he committed.

We reached a town, the name of which I

forget, nor does it signify now: as usual it was entered pell-mell by the horde, and the work of destruction commenced. Why should I conceal it? I was as busy as the rest, and not a house or hut of any description escaped my followers and myself. Ghuffoor Khan was busy too. I had completed my work; I had torn ornaments from the females, terrified their husbands and fathers into giving up their small hoards of money; and having got all I could, I was preparing to leave the town in company with my Thugs, who never separated from me. We were passing through the main street on our return, when our attention was attracted to a good looking house, from which issued the most piercing screams of terror and agony.

I instantly dismounted, and bidding my men follow me, we rushed into the house. Never shall I forget the scene which met my eyes, which we reached the place from whence the screams proceeded. There was Ghuffoor Khan, with seven or eight of his men, engaged in a horrid work. Three dead bodies lay on the floor weltering in their blood, which poured from the still warm corpses. Two were fine young men, the other an elderly woman.

Before Ghuffoor Khan stood a venerable

man, suffering under the torture of having a horse's nose-bag full of hot ashes tied over his mouth, while one of the Khan's followers struck him incessantly on the back with the hilt of his sword. The miserable wretch was half choked, and it was beyond his power to have uttered a word in reply to the interrogations which were thundered in his ear by the Khan himself as to where his treasure was concealed. Three young women of great beauty were engaged in a fruitless scuffle with the others of Ghuffoor Khan's party; and their disordered appearance and heart-rending shrieks too well told what had been their fate previous to my entrance.

What could I do? I dared not openly have attacked the Khan, though I half drew my sword from its scabbard, and would have rushed on him; but he was my superior, and had I then put him and his men to death, it could not have been concealed from Cheetoo,—and what would have been my fate? So checking the momentary impulse, which I had so nearly followed, I approached him, and endeavoured to withdraw his attention from the horrible work in which he was engaged.

“Come, Khan Sahib,” I cried, “near us is a

house which has resisted my utmost efforts to enter: I want you to aid me, and, Inshalla! it will repay the trouble, for I have heard that it is full of money and jewels, as the family is rich." I did not tell a lie, for I had endeavoured to break open the gate of a large house, but desisted when I was informed that it was uninhabited.

"Wait awhile," said he; "I have had rare sport here; these fools must needs oppose our entrance with drawn weapons, and I got a scratch on the arm from one of them myself. But what could they do—the kafirs! against a true believer? They fell in this room, and their old mother too, by my own sword. My men have been amusing themselves with their wives; whilst I, you see, am trying to get what I can out of this obstinate old villain; but he will not listen to reason, and I have been obliged to make him taste hot ashes."

"Perhaps he has naught to give," said I; "at any rate he cannot speak while that bag is over his mouth; let it be removed, and we will hear what he has to say."

"Try it," said the Khan; "but we shall make nothing of him you will see."

“Remove the bag,” cried I to the Pindharee who was behind him; “let him speak, and bring some water; his throat is full of ashes.”

The bag was removed, and a vessel full of water, which was in a corner of the room, was brought and put to his lips; but he rejected it with loathing, for he was a Hindoo and a Brahmin.

“Drink!” cried the infuriated Khan at beholding his gesture; “drink, or by Alla I will force it down thy throat. Kafir, to whom the urine of a cow is a delicacy, darest thou refuse water from the hands of a Moslem?”

“Blood-thirsty devil,” said the old man in a husky voice, “water from thy hands, or any of thy accursed race, would poison me. I would rather drink my own son’s blood, which is flowing yonder, than such pollution.”

“Ha! sayest thou so? then, in the name of the blessed Prophet, thou shalt taste it. Here, Sumund Khan, get some up from the floor; yonder is a cup—fill it to the brim; the old man shall drink it, as he would the wine of Paradise.”

“Hold!” cried I to Ghuffoor Khan; “you would not do so inhuman an act.”

“Nay, interfere not,” said the Khan, setting

his teeth; "you and I, Meer Sahib, are friends—let us remain so; but we shall quarrel if I am hindered in my purpose; and has he not said he preferred it to pure water?"

Sumund Khan had collected the blood, and the cup was half filled with the warm red liquid—a horrible draught, which he now presented to the miserable father. "Drink!" said he, offering the cup with a mock polite gesture; "think it Ganges water, and it will open thy heart to tell us where thy treasures are."

Ghuffoor Khan laughed loudly. "By Alla! thou hast a rare wit, Sumund Khan; the idea should be written in a book: I will tell Chee-too of it."

But the old man turned from them with loathing, and his chest heaved as though he were about to be sick.

"There's no use wasting time," cried Ghuffoor Khan; "open his mouth with your dagger and pour the draught into it."

It was done; by Alla! Sahib, the two did it before my eyes,—fiends that they were! Not only did they pour the blood down the old man's throat, but in forcing open his mouth they cut his lips in a ghastly manner, and his cheek was laid open.

“Now tell us where the gold is!” cried Ghuffoor Khan. “Of what use is this obstinacy? Knowest thou not that thy life is in my power, and that one blow of my sword will send thee to Jehanum, where those fools are gone before thee?”—and he pointed to the dead.

“Strike!” cried the sufferer, “strike! your blow will be welcome; I am old and fit for death. Why do ye delay?”

“But the gold, the treasures!” roared the Khan, stamping on the ground. “Why, are you a fool?”

“Gold, I have told ye, I have none,” he replied; “I told you so at first, but ye would not listen. We gave you all we had, and ye were not satisfied. Ye have murdered my sons and my wife, and dishonoured my daughters. Kill us all, and we will be thankful.”

“Hear him!” cried the Khan savagely; “he mocks us. Oh the wilful wickedness of age—is it not proverbial! One of you bring some oil and a light; we will see whether this humour can stand my final test, which has never yet failed.”

By this time the house was full of Pindharees, and, if I had wished it, I had not dared to interfere further. I stood looking on, determined

to let him have his course ; he was only hastening his own fate, and why should I prevent it?

The oil was brought, and a quantity of rags were torn from the dhotees, or waist-cloths, of the murdered men. They were dipped in the oil, and wound round the fingers of the old man to as great a thickness as was possible.

“ Now bring a light,” cried the Khan, “ and hold him fast.”

A light was kindled, and the man held it in his hand.

“ I give you a last chance,” said the Khan, speaking from between his closed teeth ; “ you know, I dare say, the use your fingers will be put to ; be quick and answer, or I will make torches of them, and they shall light me to your treasures, which I warrant are hidden in some dark hole.”

“ Do your worst,” answered the old man in a desperate tone. “ Ye will not kill me ; and if my sufferings will in any way gratify you, even let it be so ; for Narayun has given me into your power, and it is his will and not yours which does this. You will not hear me cry out though my arms were burnt off to the sockets. I spit at you !”

“Light the rags!” roared Ghuffoor Khan; “this is not to be endured.”

They were lit—one by one they blazed up, while his hands were forcibly held down to his sides to accelerate the effect of the fire. Alla, Alla! it was a sickening sight. The warm flesh of the fingers hissed under the blaze of the oiled rags, which were fed from time to time with fresh oil, as men pour it upon a torch.

The old man had overrated his strength. What nerves could bear such exquisite torture? His shrieks were piteous, and would have melted a heart of stone; but Ghuffoor Khan heeded them not: he stood glutting his savage soul with the sufferings of the wretched creature before him, and asking him from time to time, with the grin of a devil, whether he would disclose his treasures. But the person he addressed was speechless, and after nature was fairly exhausted he sunk down in utter insensibility.

“You have killed him,” I exclaimed. “For the love of Alla, let him alone, and let us depart; what more would you have? either he has no money, or he will not give it up.”

“Where be those daughters of a defiled mother?” cried he to his followers, not heed-

ing what I said to him. "Where are they? bring them forward, that I may ask them about the money, for money there must be."

But they too were dead! ay, they had been murdered also; by whom I know not, but their bodies were found in the next room weltering in their blood.

The news was brought to the Khan, and he was more savage than ever; he gnashed his teeth like a wild beast; he was fearful to look on.

The old man had revived, for water had been poured on his face and on his fingers; he raised himself up, looked wildly about him, and then gazed piteously on his mutilated hands. Were they men or devils by whom he was surrounded? By Alla! Sahib, they were not men, for they laughed at him and his almost unconscious actions.

"Speak!" cried the Khan, striking him with his sword, "speak, kafir! or more tortures are in store for thee."

But he spoke not—he was more than half-dead: misery and torture had done their utmost.

The Khan drew his sword. Again he cried, "Speak!" as he raised the weapon above his head. I fancied I saw the old man's lips smile,

and move as though he would have spoken: he cast his eyes upwards, but no word escaped him.

The sword was quivering above his head in the nervous grasp of the Khan; and seeing he got no answer, it descended with its full force on the old man's forehead, almost dividing the head in two. Need I say he was instantly dead?

I was satisfied; Ghuffoor Khan's cup too was full; for my own determination was made on that spot,—I swore it to myself as I looked at the dead and rushed from the house.

CHAPTER V.

“ They plied him well with wine,
And he roared wild songs in glee :
Hurrah ! cried the devil ; he ’ll soon be mine ;
And he chuckled right merrilye.”

OLD BALLAD.

FROM that hour I made a determination to destroy him. No sooner had I reached the camp than I assembled all my Thugs, and laid before them a scheme I had long been revolving in my mind. I spoke to them as follows :

“ You have seen, my brethren, that Ghuffoor Khan is a devil ; such a person can hardly be called a man : bad as these Pindharees are, he is the worst among them, and is unfit to live. You, Motee and Peer Khan, remember the fate of the Brahmin girl at Karinjah ; you may remember my ill-suppressed indignation,

which then almost impelled me to destroy this fiend; and I would have done it, but that I felt his fate was not in my hands. I felt that Alla would sooner or later urge me on to be the humble means of a retributive justice overtaking him. I have hitherto refrained, though I have sometimes fancied his hour was come. I thought that some crime blacker than any previous one would at last be committed by him, and it has been done. You all saw what it was. Can he ever do worse?"

"He cannot!" cried my men with one voice; "he has reached the mark, and he is ours."

"He shall be so," said I: "now listen. You know I have still three bottles of the sweet wine of the Feringhees, which I brought with me from Guntoor; he is very fond of it, and will easily be persuaded to come here and drink it with us; I will dose his share with opium, and after a few cups, he will become stupefied, and will fall an easy prey to us."

"Good!" cried Peer Khan, "it is an excellent plan. What say you to putting it into execution this very night?"

"Not tonight," I said; "we must be cautious in this immense camp. Tomorrow let my tent be pitched on the utmost verge of it; nay,

a short distance beyond it,—and in the dead of the night, when all are overpowered by sleep, he can be despatched.”

“I beg to represent,” said Peer Khan, “that Ghuffoor Khan’s saddle is well lined; could we not get possession of it?”

“I have been thinking about it,” replied I, “but I do not see how we are to get it without much risk and fear of discovery.”

Peer Khan pondered for a moment; he then said,—

“I have a plan, Jemadar, which you may perhaps be able to improve upon; and, Inshalla! we will have the saddle. What I say is this: when the Khan is pretty well intoxicated, do you propose to him to sleep in your tent, and to send for his horse and saddle, so as to be near him to mount in the morning. If the saddle is brought, we can empty it of its contents and bury it with him; if not, we can only rejoice at having done a good action in having destroyed him.”

“I am not sure,” observed Motee, “that the omens will be good; we had better try them.”

“Do so,” said I; “I will think over Peer Khan’s plan and see what can be done.”

We then separated for the night.

During the next morning's travel, when we were not separated by the confusion which ensued on a village or town being plundered, I purposely threw myself as much in Ghuffoor Khan's way as I could, and we conversed on the success of our expedition, and the adventures which had befallen us.

"Do you remember, Khan Sahib," said I, "the attack on the houses at Guntoor, and how we ravaged the Feringhees' store-houses in a vain search for valuables? my curses on them! They are as rich as Nuwabs, and yet not one of them has a gold or silver dish in his possession, nor a jewel or valuable of any kind,—nothing but china-ware. And do you remember how we smashed it all?"

"Ay, I remember," growled the Khan; "and but for our chief's cowardice,—between you and me I say it,—we might have attacked and carried the place where the treasure was, and enriched ourselves not a little; whereas, as it was, we got nothing for our trouble. We destroyed their houses however, and that was some satisfaction."

"True," said I, "it was, Khan; how their hearts must have burned as they saw the bright flames devouring their abodes! Do you re-

member too the precious stuff I got hold of and recommended to your notice,—the wine in the small bottles, with printed papers upon them? It was rare good stuff.”

“Mashalla! it was indeed,” cried the Khan; “the flavour of it did not leave my lips for some days. These infidels know what good wine is, that is certain. Would that I had brought some with me! a few bottles would have been easily carried, and one would have enjoyed it after a day’s toil.”

“I was more careful than you were, Khan; such wine is not always to be got; I brought away some bottles, and I have them still, I believe, if they be not broken.”

“Some with you? Nay, then, be not niggardly of your treasure; let me taste it again, for I swear to you I believe there will be no such nectar in Paradise.”

“It is at your service, Khan; but to escape scandal, what do you say to coming to my tent tonight when it is dusk?—that is, if any remains, of which I will give you notice. One of my fellows shall cook a good pilao, and after it we will enjoy the wine quietly.”

“Your words are as sweet as the wine itself, good Meer Sahib; truly I will be with thee. I

will tell my Saees to bring my horse and picket him among yours; no one will see me, and I will bring no one with me. I might exceed, you know, and I would not be an open scandal to the faith."

My heart leaped to my mouth as he uttered the words. The saddle, then, would be ours without any trouble or risk of detection: how I blessed him for acceding so readily to my plans!

"True, Khan," said I, "it will not do to be observed: we must be secret. I will have no one in my tent but Peer Khan, whom you know; he is my foster-brother, and a rare companion: we will have a pleasant carouse. I will send him to you when the pilao is ready."

"No, no!" cried he, "do not, there is no need of it; I will stroll to your tent after dusk. And, hark ye!" said he to his Saees, who was trotting after him, "mind, you are to bring my horse and saddle to the Meer Sahib's tent as soon as you see me going towards it. Remember, you are to lead it after me, as though I were going to ride; and when you arrive there you are to picket it among his horses."

“Jo hookum,” replied the fellow; “your orders shall be obeyed.”

“And mind,” continued the Khan, “you are not to tell anyone where I am going, nor to answer any questions, if any are put to you, as you lead the horse along.”

“Certainly not; since such is my lord’s pleasure, I dare not disobey.”

“You had better not,” cried the Khan, “or I will try and find a korla for you.”

The fellow dropped behind again, and we resumed our desultory conversation, chatting as we rode along on the merits of the different leaders, and how they had behaved. Ghuffoor Khan was a pleasant companion, and his remarks were full of wit and satire. I had put him in good humour by the prospect of a deep carouse, and we rode on cheerfully.

We reached our halting-place for the day, after a long and intensely hot march; and glad were we to get under the cover of our tents to screen ourselves from the noonday heat. I had several messages from the Khan in the course of the day to know whether the repast was ready; but it would not have answered my purpose to have allowed that it was,

or to have had it prepared one moment before the time fixed.

“ You have been riding with the Khan, Sahib, all the morning,” said Motee to me, “ and have not, I suppose, observed the omens ? ”

“ I have not,” said I anxiously ; “ but surely you have done so ? ” For I knew how much they would influence my men ; nay, that without favourable ones they would have absolutely refused any participation in the matter.

“ I have not been negligent,” replied Motee. “ Last night, after I parted with you, Peer Khan, myself, and the others made an offering of goor to the Nishān, and, blessed be Bhowanee, she has vouchsafed us the Thibao and Pilhao ; you need, therefore, be under no apprehensions, for she is favourable.”

“ I was sure she would be, Motee, for I observe the hand of Alla guiding me ; and I verily believe I should have followed the influence of my own desires in this matter even had they been unfavourable.”

“ Nay, say not so, Jemadar,” said he laughing, “ you are too good a Thug for that ; but there is now no fear, for the omens were indeed cheering.”

“ If we succeed,” said I, “ I have some

thoughts of further work in our own way; but of this more hereafter. There will be a stir when his disappearance is known, and we must be quiet for a time."

"Ay, that is like you, Jemadar. We have been consulting among ourselves, and had come to the determination of proposing some adventures to you; for here these dogs of Pindharees lie, night after night, and each fellow is worth some hundreds of rupees. Yet we have been content to remain inactive; and I, for one, say shame on us! We need not pass a night without some work."

"Wait, good Motee; let us secure the Khan first. And now to arrange matters; we must be our own Lughaees."

"For that we are prepared, Meer Sahib; a Thug must do his duty in any grade when occasion calls for his services. We are all ready for work."

"Then we must lose no time; you must join your own pall* to mine, and put some screen or other between them; in the empty space the grave must be prepared. It had better be ready before he comes:—but no, he

* A small open tent.

will perhaps suspect us ; it can soon be made afterwards."

" You are right, Jemadar, he would suspect : he need not be buried deep ; and there are three of our men who are old Lughaees ; they will prepare it in a few minutes."

" And his Saees,—he must die also, Mottee."

" Certainly," he replied. " Do you and Peer Khan deal with the Khan, and leave the Saees to us—we will manage him."

" Good ; our arrangements are then complete. Remember that Peer Khan alone eats with us ; you must be all outside, and see that the horses are kept saddled, for we must fly instantly if we are discovered or suspected. I have no fears, however, on either score."

" Nor have I," said Mottee ; " the matter will create a stir, as he is a leader of note ; but it will be supposed, either that he has gone off with his plunder, or that some one has murdered him. I tell you, Meer Sahib, that many a Pindharee has died by the hand of his fellow since we left Nemawur."

" I do not doubt it, Mottee. I have heard of many brawls, and men of this kind have but few scruples. They are a wicked set, and far

worse than those who formed the first expedition. But now go, get the pall ready, and send Peer Khan to me.”

The evening came ; the calls of the faithful to evening prayers resounded through the camp with the last red streak of day. Men were assembled in knots, kneeling on their carpets, addressing their prayers to Alla,—men whose hands were scarcely cleansed from the blood they had that day shed ! The ceremony over, each separated from his fellow, to lie beside his faithful horse, and to enjoy a night of repose, to fit him for the toil, the rapine, and plunder of the ensuing day.

The time approached ; and as I sat in my tent, awaiting the Khan’s arrival, my heart exulted within me, that for once in my life I should do a good action, in revenging the murdered. Peer Khan was with me : we scarcely spoke ; our minds were too full of what was to follow to speak much.

“ Have you drugged the bottle ? ” he asked.

“ I have. I have put two tolas of opium into it ; I have tasted it, and the flavour of the drug is perceptible ; but it will be the second bottle, and he will not discover it ; and if he does, we cannot help it, we must take our chance. Do

you think we can manage him between us, without any noise?"

"Shame on us if we do not, Meer Sahib; I am as strong a man as he is, and your roomal never fails. But to prevent any noise being heard, suppose we propose to admit Motee and two or three others to sing and play,—I mean when the Khan has swallowed his first bottle. Motee has a sitar and a small drum with him, and its noise will drown all others."

"No, no!" said I; "others might be attracted by the singing, and come to hear it; it will not do: we must do our best, and leave the rest to Alla. However we will see when the time comes."

The evening was far advanced, and everything around us was quiet. A few fires, here and there throughout the camp, marked where, at each, a solitary Pindharee cooked his last meal of the day; the rest were already buried in profound slumber, and all nearest to us were still. I stood at the door of my humble tent looking anxiously for the Khan's coming; and at length I observed a figure stealing along in the dusk, carefully avoiding the prostrate forms which lay in his path. Was it the Khan? Yes. "By Alla he comes!" said I

to Peer Khan; "I see him now: and there is his horse behind him, and the Saees leading it."

"Shookur Khoda!" exclaimed my companion; "he has not deceived us. I feared he had, since it is so late."

"Is that you, Meer Sahib?" cried the voice of Ghuffoor Khan. "I feared I should have missed your tent in this cursed darkness."

"Here am I, Khan, and you are welcome to the poor tent of your servant."

"So you have found the wine, eh?" said the Khan, rubbing his hands in glee. "You have not cheated me?"

"By your soul, no! Khan, I have not; there it is you see, and Peer Khan is gone for the pilao."

"Khoob, by Alla! Meer Sahib, I have fasted all day on purpose to do justice to it; and I should have been here an hour sooner, but I was summoned to the durbar about some trifle or other; and I have kept you waiting."

"And your horse, Khan?"

"Oh, he is here; my Saees has picketed him among yours. I have deceived my other servants,—I swore I had a headache and could not eat, and pretended to lie down to sleep,

having given them all strict orders not to disturb me. The knaves knew better than to do so; and so, after lying quiet awhile, I stole out of my tent behind, and have fairly given them the slip. I suppose your people can throw some fodder before the animal?"

"Surely: I have cared for that already."

Peer Khan now entered with the pilao; and seating ourselves, our fingers were soon buried in the midst of it.

"Now for the wine, Meer Sahib; the pilao is dry without it, and my throat lacks moisture."

"Here it is," said I, pouring it out into a cup; "see how it sparkles, like the fire of a ruby."

"Ay," said the Khan, after he had drained it to the bottom, "this is wine for the Hooris; how one enjoys it! Think, Meer Sahib, how we true believers will quaff in Paradise, (if what we get there will be as good,) surrounded by twenty Hooris, and each vying with the other to please us! But drink, man,—I would not take the whole."

"Nay, that bottle is your own share, Khan, and there is besides another for you; Peer Khan and I will divide this one between us.

"T is a pity there is not more, or that the bottles were not larger."

"Ay, it is to be regretted certainly, Meer Sahib, but what there is, we must make the most of;" and he took another draught. "Only think," continued he, "of those infidels the Feringhees drinking such stuff as this every day. I now scarcely marvel at their doing great deeds when they are drunk. And is it not the case, Meer Sahib, that they all sit round a table, and drink, and roar out songs, till they fall down intoxicated*?"

"So I have been credibly informed, Khan. By Alla! they are jolly dogs."

"I wish I was in their service," said Ghuffoor Khan, after a short silence. "Do you think they would give one wine to drink when one wanted it?"

"I have not a doubt of it," I replied.

"Then I will take employ with them, Meer Sahib; this stuff would tempt many a better Moosulman than I am to serve an infidel. But they say Sikundar Jah drinks it also."

"So I heard when I was at Hyderabad," said I; "indeed it was there I first tasted this li-

* The Khan probably referred to proceedings of a very antiquated character.

quor; and I knew the bottles again when I saw them in the Feringhees' houses at Guntoor."

"It is fit drink for a prince," sighed the Khan, when he had finished the bottle, and looking at it with a most rueful countenance. "That is finished, Meer Sahib; thou saidst thou had another?"

"Ay, Khan! but only this one," I replied handing him the other.

"I feel happy now, Meer Sahib. By Alla! I could sing—I could dance I think, though it would be a scandal to do so. The Prophet, however, has not forbidden a Moslem to sing. May his name be honoured! Have any of you a sitar? People say that I have a good hand."

"Go and fetch Motee-ram's," said I to Peer Khan; "it is a good one. Shall the owner of it come also, Khan?"

"Nay, I care not, Meer Sahib; though the devil came, I would pluck him by the beard: let him come. Can he sing?"

"Like a bulbul, Khan; I have rarely heard a better voice from a man."

"Oh, for some women!" sighed the Khan; "one misses the glances of their antelope-eyes, and the tinkle of their anklets, in moments like these. Ah, Meer Sahib, we were happy dogs

when we were encamped in the Krishna. There was one charmer—but why speak of them, Meer Sahib,—why speak of them?”

“We shall enjoy their company the more when we get to Nemawur,” said I. “But here is Motee with his sitar.”

Motee made his salam and sat down.

“Is the instrument tuned, Motee—thou pearl of singers?” cried the Khan, bursting into a laugh at his play upon Motee’s name. “Hast thou tuned it?”

“I have, noble Khan; though it is not worthy the touch of so exalted a person.”

“Nay, ’t is a good sitar, and a sweet one,” said the Khan, as he ran his fingers over the strings in a manner which showed him to be a proficient.

“Wah!” cried all of us at once; “play, noble Khan! the hand which could execute such a prelude as that can do wonders.”

“Give me some more drink,” cried he, “and I will try. Knowest thou any ghuzuls, Motee?”

“I am indifferently skilled in them, Khan Sahib; nevertheless, if my lord will mention one, I will try. The tuppas of my own country I know most of.”

“Pah!” cried the Khan, “who would sing tuppas? I will name a ghuzul which is in every-one’s mouth—sing ‘Mahi--Alum, Soz-i-mun;’ I warrant me thou knowest it. But the wine, Meer Sahib, pour it out for me; thou art my Saqi, thou knowest. I will sing an ode to thee, as Hafiz has written and sung many a one to his; peace be to his memory! Ah! that was good; but oh, Meer Sahib, it hath a different flavour from the last.”

“Very likely,” said I; “the bottle you see hath a different paper on it; perhaps it is a better kind.”

“It is good, and that is all I care for, Meer Sahib. Now proceed, good Motee.”

Motee did as he was ordered, and his voice and the Khan’s accompaniment were worthy of a better audience than that which heard them.

“Wah, wah! Shabash!” cried Peer Khan and I, when it was ended; “this is rare fortune, to hear two such skilful musicians in this unsainted jungle. Now it is your turn, Khan Sahib.”

“More wine, Meer Sahib, ‘Saqi mera!’ more wine, for the sake of the Twelve Imams. Oh that there were a thousand bottles, that we could meet as we have done now every night!

Good wine and good companions—have they not been ever the burthen of the songs of the poets?”

“Is there much left?” he continued, when he had drained the cup.

“About half the bottle,” said I.

“Then give Motee a cup, Meer Sahib; he deserves it.”

“Excuse me,” said Motee, “but I am a Hindoo and a Brahmin.”

“Thou shouldst have been a true believer, Motee; Khan would sound as well after thy name as Ram. Why, man, our blessed Prophet would have had thee to sing to him when thou hadst reached Paradise!”

Ghuffoor Khan’s voice was now rather thick, and he made but a poor hand of the ghuzul he attempted; but it was very laughable to see him roll his eyes from side to side like a dancing-girl, and to hear him trying to imitate their quavers and shakes.

“Pah!” cried he, when he had sung a verse, “my throat is dry; I want more wine, I think, Meer Sahib; but the truth is, I caught a cold some days ago, and am still hoarse.”

He tried again after a fresh draught, but with no better success. In vain he coughed

and hemmed to clear his throat; the wine, and the still better opium, were doing their work as quickly as we could desire.

“Do you sing again, Motee,—merree Motee! merree Goweya!” said the Khan insinuatingly. “A curse on the water of this country, which spoils a man’s singing. Sing, man, and I will play; it cannot spoil that, at any rate; and the Meer Sahib hath provided an antidote for this night at least.”

Motee sang again; but the accompaniment was wild and irregular, and the Khan at last threw down the sitar.

“It will not do, Meer Sahib, after the fatigue (a hiccup) and the trouble I have had (hiccup) all day, shouting and bullying these rascally Pindharees (hiccup). How can it be expected, Meer Sahib, that I, Ghuffoor Khan, the leader of three thousand horse, should play and sing like a Goweya? By Alla I will not (hiccup). But these hiccups, Meer Sahib, what is to cure them?”

“Some more wine, Khan Sahib; nothing but liquor can cure them. And there is more; there is still another cup.”

“Then give me all!” cried the Khan; “I will drink it standing like a kafir Feringhee—may

their sisters be defiled, ay and their mothers too! Nevertheless, as I said, I will serve them and drink among them, and none shall drink more than Ghuffoor Khan. Thou saidst they drink standing; and what do they say?"

"Hip, hip, hip!" said I; "I learned the words from a vagabond who had been a Khidmutgar among them, and had seen their wild orgies."

"What, hip, hip, hip! those are the words, eh? I wonder what they mean."

"They are an invocation to their Prophet, I believe;" said I, "much as we say 'Bismilla ir ruhman ir ruheem!'"

"I do not doubt it, Meer Sahib. Now help me to rise, for the stuff is in my brain, and the tent goeth round about; help me to rise I say, and I will quaff the last drop both as a true Moslem and as a Feringhee. Ha! said I not well?"

"Excellently well, great Khan," said I, as I helped him to his feet; "now, here is the wine."

"Bismilla!" shouted the Khan, "hip! hip! hip!" and he drained the cup to the bottom; his head sunk on his breast, his eyes rolled wildly: he made a desperate attempt to rush forward, and fell at his full length upon the ground.

“Bus!” cried Peer Khan, as he got out of the way; “enough, great Khan! noble Khan, thou art a dead man now. Feringhee and Moslem, thou hast made rare fun for us.”

“Raise him up,” said I to them: “seat him on his end. I am ready, and do one of ye give the jhirnee.”

They raised him up, and as he was seated, his head again sunk on his shoulder, and some froth came from his mouth.

“He is dying,” said Motee; “we ought not to touch him; it is forbidden.”

“Not a bit of it,” said I; “all drunken men are in this way; I have seen hundreds in the same state; so hold his head up, and give the jhirnee;” for I had taken my post behind him.

They did so; Peer Khan uttered the fatal words, and Ghuffoor Khan wrestled out his last agony under my never-failing gripe.

“Enough, Meer Sahib,” said Peer Khan, who was holding his feet; “enough! he is dead.”

“Ul-humd-ul-illa!” I exclaimed; “it is finished, blessed be the Prophet and Bhowanee! Go for the Lughaees; he must be put under-ground immediately. Now for the Saees.”

We left the Khan’s body and went out; the

others were waiting for us. "Where does he lie?" I asked.

"There," said one of the men; "he is fast asleep, and has been so for an hour."

"So much the better," said Peer Khan; "leave him to me."

I watched him and Motee as they approached the sleeper. Peer Khan touched him with his foot; he started up to a sitting position and rubbed his eyes, but Peer Khan threw himself upon him, and he was dead in an instant, ere he had become conscious. Nothing now remained but the disposal of the bodies and the saddle. The grave, a shallow one, was quickly dug; and while the Lughaees were preparing it, myself, Peer Khan, and Motee unripped the lining and pockets of the saddle, and took out the gold. There was naught else. It was in coin, and in small lumps, as the jewels he had gotten in plunders had been melted down from time to time. We had no leisure then to speculate on its value, but we cut the saddle to pieces with our knives to make sure that none remained in it, and the fragments were buried with the bodies.

"What shall we do with the horse, Meer Sahib?" asked Motee. "We cannot take him with us, for there is not a man in the camp

who does not know Ghuffoor Khan's horse; and we have no time to stain him."

I was puzzled for a while; to have retained the noble animal would have ensured our detection, and I scarcely knew what to do. At last I hit upon an expedient. "He must be destroyed," said I; "'t is a splendid beast, certainly, yet our lives are worth more than his. Beyond the camp, about an arrow's flight, is a deep ravine. Do any of you know it?"

"None of us have seen it," said all at once.

"Then I must go myself, and do you, Ghous Khan (he was one of my men), accompany me; we will throw him into it. Go and loosen him from his pickets."

I followed him, and we conducted the animal to the edge of the ravine; it was deep, and just suited our purpose, as the banks were precipitous.

"That will do," said I, when he had brought the horse to the edge; "now rein his head to one side; we must kill him before he falls in."

He did so; I had prepared my sword, and drew it sharply across the poor brute's throat; the blood gushed out, he reeled backwards, fell into the dark ravine, and we heard his carcass reach the bottom with a heavy fall. I

looked over, but all I saw was an indistinct mass at the bottom, while a few groans of its death agony reached my ears.

“Enough!” said I; “come away; the jackals will have a glorious feast ere morning, and no one will ever think of looking here. But it was a pity to kill the brute.”

“He was worth a good thousand rupees, and would have fetched that price at Hyderabad. Why did you not send him there? I would have taken him.”

“I did not think of that,” said I; “but no matter now; we will earn more than that before we reach Nemawur.”

“How, Meer Sahib? we get but little in this poor country.”

“Trust me, Ghous Khan,” said I; “we have begun, and, Inshalla! we will go on with the work.”

I reached the tent, and the Lughaees had done their business well; our carpets had been spread over the spot where the Khan lay in his last resting-place, and we all lay down and slept soundly.

Ghuffoor Khan was missed at his accustomed post the next morning; a thousand conjectures were hazarded as to his fate, but no one could

account for his disappearance. Some said the devil had taken him for his wickedness; others, that he had amassed an immense plunder, and was fearful of its being wrested from him, and he had therefore escaped with it, as it was known to be sewed up in his saddle.

When we reached our next encampment, Cheetoo sent for me: I went, and found him seated in full durbar, and the Khan's servants as prisoners before him. I made my usual salam, and he requested me to be seated near him.

"This is a most mysterious affair, Meer Sahib," said he; "Ghuffoor Khan is gone; and Alla or the Shitan only knows whither! If he has fled, it is as extraordinary a thing as I ever heard of; for he has been attached to me from his youth, and I have ever been kind to him. What think you?"

"I am at a loss also," said I; "your servant knows not what to say; there are a thousand conjectures afloat, but no one can give any probable solution to the mystery. But have you examined the servants? surely they must know something."

"I have not, Meer Sahib, as yet; but here they are, and I want you to help me to

question them. You may think of some things which may escape me."

"I will do my best, Nuwab; but you had better begin—they will be afraid of you and speak the truth."

"Call one of them," said Cheetoo to an attendant.

The man came, trembling in every joint, and prostrated himself before our leader.

"What is thy name?" he asked.

"Syud Ebrahim," said the fellow.

"And what service didst thou perform to Ghuffoor Khan?"

"I am a Khidmutgar, O Asylum of the World!" said the man; "I used to keep the Khan's clothes, assist him to bathe, and attend him at night. I was always about his person."

"Now speak the truth, Ebrahim, and fear not. But I swear by the beard of the Prophet, if I detect thee lying, I will have thee cut to pieces before my face, as a warning to thy comrades."

"May I be your sacrifice!" cried the man, "I will not lie. Why should I? What I know is easily told, and 't is but little."

"Proceed," cried Cheetoo, "and remember what I have said."

“Alla is my witness,” said the man, “I know but little. My noble master came from your highness’s durbar late in the afternoon : we had prepared dinner for him, but he said he was ill, and would not eat, and that we ourselves might eat what we had cooked for him. He then went into his tent, took off his durbar dress, put away his arms, and then lay down. I was with him till this time, and sat down to shampoe him ; but he bade me begone, and I left him. I was weary with running all day by his side, and I also lay down, and did not wake till the people roused me for the march. I went into the tent to arouse him and give him his clothes, but I found him not. The bedding was just as when he had laid down, but his sword was not there, nor a stick he always walked with. This is all I know, but Shekh Qadir knows something more, if you will call him ; he saw the Khan after I did.”

Shekh Qadir was accordingly sent for, and after being cautioned and threatened as the other had been, he spoke as follows :

“I am also a Khidmutgar, but my office was not about the Khan’s person ; I used to give him his hooka, and prepare the opium he ate. Soon after dusk I heard him moving in

the tent, and I watched him; he lifted up the back part of it, and came out: I saw him walk towards the middle of the camp, and followed him: he observed me, and turned round sharp upon me; 'What,' said he, 'cannot I walk out for a few yards, to breathe the air, without some of you rascals following me? begone!' Nuwab, I was frightened, lest he should order me the korla, and I went away to the tent of a friend. I heard in the morning that he had not returned."

"This is very unsatisfactory," said I; "we have as yet no clue to his disappearance. If he has gone away, he must have ridden; where is his horse?"

"Ay, where is it?" cried Cheetoo. "Who can tell us?"

"May I be your sacrifice!" said Shekh Qadir; "the horse is not here, nor his Saees. The Khan had two horses, but the saddle of the one missing is that in which all the gold was sewed up."

"Ha!" said Cheetoo, "is it so? Where is the other Saees?"

"Peer-o-Moorshid?" cried an attendant; "he is waiting without."

"Let him too be called." The man entered.

“What knowest thou?” asked Cheetoo.

“I only know,” said the fellow, “that the gray horse was kept saddled all the afternoon; this was contrary to custom, for its saddle was always placed in the tent, near the Khan’s head when he slept. I asked my fellow Saees the reason of its being so; but he was angry with me, and said it was no business of mine, that the Khan had ordered it, and it was his pleasure. I saw him take the horse from his picket after dark, but I asked no questions.”

“There remains but one conclusion to be drawn, Nuwab Sahib,” said I. “Ghuffoor Khan has fled, and made off with the booty he had got. By all accounts he had been very fortunate; and every one said his saddle was stuffed with gold.”

“So I have also heard,” said Cheetoo; “but, yet it is hard to think of that man’s ingratitude. Here have I been associated with him from boyhood: I have raised him from obscurity, to be a leader of three thousand horse; and this has been a scurvy ending to my kindness. Go,” said he to the servants, “I find no fault with any of you; take the horse to my pagah, and let him be tied up among my own.”

Thus ended this adventure ; no suspicion fell upon us nor on any one. The Khan was known to have friends at Hyderabad, and thither it was supposed he had fled. We alone knew his fate, and it was one he had deserved by a thousand crimes too horrible to mention.

But after this we were not idle ; having begun our work, we had constant employment ; scarcely a night passed that one or two Pindharees did not fall by our hands. They were missed too, as the Khan had been, but we were favoured by the constant desertions which took place from the Lubhur ; for as we approached Nemawur, men daily made off in every direction to their houses, little relishing the fatigues of the camp, and the constant alarms we had from reports of the vicinity of the Feringhee troops, by whom we were several times nearly surprised.

Yet I was not fated to have the uniform success which had hitherto attended me. Treachery was at work, and the blow we least feared fell with a heavy hand at last, and dispersed us. I will tell you how it happened, and what befel us.

CHAPTER VI.

Pistol.—“Trust none,

For oaths are straws, men's faiths are wafer cakes,
 And Hold-fast is the only dog, my duck :
 Therefore Caveto be thy counsellor.”

KING HENRY V. act. ii. sc. 2.

AMONG the men whom I had brought with me from Jhalone was one by name Hidayut Khan. I had never seen him before, but he was slightly known to Peer Khan, as having served with him, and was represented to be an able Thug. Of the extent of his accomplishments I was ignorant, as he never had any hand in the destruction of those who died in the Pindharee camp; for I preferred allowing my own men, upon whom I could depend, to do the work. But Hidayut Khan was certainly a capital horseman, a good hand with his sword and

spear, and an active, enterprising fellow as a Pindharee. I have said we never employed him as a Bhuttote, nor even as a Shumshea; why I can hardly say, yet so it was; he acted always as a scout, and kept watch at the door of the tent while our work went on within. Many days after the death of Ghuffoor Khan, indeed when we had again reached the Nagpoor territory, and when a few days' march would have brought us to Nemawur, Peer Khan, Motee, and one or two others came to me one evening after it was dark, with faces full of concern and alarm.

“For the sake of Bhowanee,” cried I, “what is the matter? why are ye thus agitated? Speak, brothers, and say the worst; are we discovered?”

“Alas, I fear treachery,” said Motee. “For some time past we have suspected Hidayut Khan, who has absented himself from us of late in an extraordinary manner, to have disclosed what we are to a person in Cheetoo's confidence. We have dogged them several times about the camp, have detected them in earnest conversation, and this night we too greatly fear he is even now in the durbar. What can be done?”

“We must fly at once,” said I. “Now that you mention the name of Hidayut Khan, I too have my suspicions : are the horses saddled?”

“They are,” said Peer Khan, “they are always so.”

“Good,” said I; “then there is no fear. Yet I should like much to satisfy myself of the fact of our being suspected,—ay, and by Alla! I will ascertain it at once.”

“Ah, do not!” cried they; “for the sake of Bhowanee, do not throw yourself into peril; what can be gained by it? Our horses are ready; let us mount them; leave the tent where it is, and fly.”

Would to Alla that I had followed this wise counsel! matters would not have turned out as they did; but I was possessed by the idea, a headstrong man is never to be restrained, and I would hear nothing they had to say. “Is there not *one* among you,” cried I, “who will accompany me? The night is dark, and we can reach Cheetoo’s tent unobserved; we will lie down with our ears to the kanât, and hear what passes : if the worst comes, if we really are denounced, we shall have ample time to fly before they can get from the inside.”

“I will,” cried Peer Khan; but no one else

stirred; they were all paralysed by fear, and were incapable of action.

“That is spoken like yourself, brother,” cried I; “thou hast a gallant soul. Now do ye all prepare the horses for instant flight; let their tether-ropes be loosened, and the bridles put in their mouths; do not move them from their places, and no one will suspect us: and come,” cried I to Peer Khan, “there is not a moment to be lost.”

We stole out of the tent, and stealthily crept along towards Cheetoo’s, which was fortunately at no great distance. No one was about it; but we could see from the outside that, by the side of a dim lamp, three persons were engaged in earnest conversation. We lay down at the edge of the kanât, and my ears eagerly drank in the words which fell on them.

“Ajaib!” said a voice, which I knew at once to be Cheetoo’s, “and so he murdered the Khan? you said *he* did it.”

“May I be your sacrifice,” said Hidayut Khan (I knew his voice, too, immediately), “he did; I cannot say I saw him die with my own eyes, but they made him drunk, and they buried him, and Ameer Ali himself destroyed the noble horse.”

“I do not doubt it,” said Cheetoo, with a sigh; “I have done his memory foul wrong in thinking him ungrateful:—and the others?”

“They were men of scarcely any note,” said the informer, “nor do I know the names of all: one only I remember, for they had hard work to despatch him; he was a strong man, by name Hubeeb Oola, and belonged to my lord’s own pagah.”

“I knew him well,” said Cheetoo; “he was a worthy man and a brave one; and Ameer Ali slew him?”

“He did, Nuwab, with his own hands; and Motee and Peer Khan held him, or he could not have done it. This was only three nights ago, when I would fain have denounced them, but I feared no one would believe me; and as I knew Ameer Ali was in your favour, I thought no one would have listened to an accusation against him.”

“Nor would I, by Alla!” cried Cheetoo, rising up, and striking his forehead in extreme agitation (I had made a hole in the cloth with the point of my dagger, and could see all distinctly). “I would never have believed your tale, but that circumstances so strongly bear out what you have said. Who could have be-

lieved, that Ameer Ali, the kind, the benevolent —, one who opposed every scheme of violence, and protested against our ravages till I was ashamed of them myself,—who could have thought *him* a Thug?”

“But it is the truth, Nuwab,” said the vile wretch; “when you have seized them, you will find ample evidence of what I tell you: the sword of Ghuffoor Khan is at this moment girded to the side of Peer Khan, who threw away his own.”

“That will be conclusive indeed,” said Cheetoo. “But how came you to join them?”

“I was at my village, near Jhalone,” said Hidayut Khan; “I had formerly known Peeroo, (as we call Peer Khan,) and he asked me to join him and his jemadar, and to follow the Pindharees. I never suspected them to be Thugs,—who could, when Ameer Ali and his father were high in favour with the Rajah? and it was not till the Khan’s death that they began their horrible work.”

“Well,” said Cheetoo, “you have laid the plan; the sooner you put it into execution the better. You have prepared the horsemen, have you not?” said he to the other man, whose face I knew.

“ I have,” he replied ; “ they are standing by their horses, all ready for the signal to set on—fifty good fellows ; none of the Thugs will escape us.”

“ Ya Alla ! ” cried Cheetoo ; “ how will he look on me ? and how can I bring myself to order the punishment he deserves ? Ah, Ameer Ali, how thou hast deceived me ! how could anyone read deceit in that honest face of thine ! ”

“ Go,” said he to Hidayut Khan and the others ; “ bring them to me without delay. I will not forget thy reward : thou hast asked for the saddle of Peer Khan.”

“ No more ! no more ! ” cried the villain ; “ ’t is all I want.”

“ Ay,” said Peer Khan to me in a whisper, “ but he has not got it yet, and he is a cunning fellow if he does get it. Come, Meer Sahib, we must be off—they are moving.”

I was almost fascinated to the spot. I could have lain there and listened to the discourse ; but the peril was too imminent, too deadly for a moment’s delay. I got up, and sneaking along, we saw the two figures cross the threshold of the tent, and with hurried steps direct their

course to a part of the camp where the pagah was, and which was close to our tent.

Fear lent us speed; we flew to our tent, and for a few moments were engaged in tying up some valuables we had brought out for division; having done this, we hurried to our horses. Some of the men were already in their saddles; I leaped on my spirited animal, and drew my sword, ready for the worst. I wished all to move off in a body, for as yet there was no alarm,—but I was deceived; we were surrounded! The instant we were in motion a body of horse dashed at us, and we were at once engaged in a conflict for life or death. What happened I know not; I cut down the only man who was opposed to me; Peer Khan was equally fortunate. I received a slight wound from another, which I little heeded; we urged our horses to their utmost speed, and the darkness favoured our escape.

I soon found, as I slackened my pace a little, that some of my men were with me. We had agreed to take a northerly direction, and rendezvous near a small village which could be seen from the camp; and by this precaution those who had escaped were soon collected together.

We were not pursued, though we heard the shouts of the Pindharees, as they hallooted to each other in and about their camp, and the shots from their matchlocks; and we afterwards heard they had grievously wounded many of each other in mistake. I almost dreaded to call over the names of those who stood around me, for I could not see their faces, and no one spoke a word to his companion.

We waited for a considerable time,—for an hour or more. Gradually the noise and shouting in the Pindharee camp died away, and by the straggling watch-fires alone could one have told that a mighty army was encamped there. Now and then the shrill neigh of a horse was borne to us upon the night wind, and when it ceased there was again a melancholy silence. The little village too was deserted; part of it had been burned, and the embers of the houses still emitted sparks, now and then sending up a flame, as portions of dry grass of the thatched huts which had escaped became ignited. Further delay was useless; I therefore broke the silence, which was painful to all.

“How many are there of us, Peer Khan?”
I asked, in a low tone.

“Eleven,” said he; “the rest I fear have fallen.”

“I pray Alla they have; better far to fall by a sword-cut or a spear-thrust, than to be exposed to torture; but who are absent?—is Motee here?”

“Alas! no, Meer Sahib. Motee I saw struck down. I made a cut at the Pindharee who wounded him, but the darkness deceived me: I missed him.”

“And who else are absent?” said I, stifling my grief, for Motee had been as a brother to me; “let those who are here tell their names.”

They did so. Ghous Khan was away, and Nuzzur Ali and Ramdeen Singh, three of our best men; Motee was a fourth; Hidayut Khan, the traitor, was a fifth, and all our attendants and grooms.

“’Tis no use staying here,” said I; “we must make the best of our way to Jhalone; there we will wait the usual time, and if none return, the ceremonies for the dead must be performed for them. None of ye will grudge your share of the booty we have (blessed be Bhowanee!) brought away with us, to their

wives and families; swear this unto me, ye that are willing."

"We swear!" cried the whole, almost with one voice.

"I am satisfied," said I; "now let us proceed. We must turn off the main road when it is light; we all know the paths through the jungles, and by them we will travel, till we are safely beyond Hussingabad: beyond that I fear not."

"Proceed," cried Peer Khan; "we follow you."

And we rode on in silence, with heavy hearts. We travelled thus for many days. Through the country we passed, we represented ourselves, as long as the Nagpoor territory lasted, to be servants of the government on a secret mission; and though we were often suspected and questioned, yet by my address I brought my band clear out of all the difficulties; and our hearts bounded with joy when at length we arrived on the banks of the noble Nurbudda, and dashing our steeds into the ford soon left its waters between us and our enemies.

Inured as we were to the fatigues of long and severe marches, and our horses also, not a day passed but fifteen or twenty coss were tra-

velled, and at this rate we were not long in reaching our home. Blessed be Alla! we did reach it, and glad was my heart once again to see the groves of Jhalone after my weary pilgrimage. No notice had we been able to give of our approach, and I alighted at the door of my own house unattended and alone, covered with dust, and worn by fatigue and exposure to the fierce heat of the sun, and as much changed by anxiety for the fate of my poor comrades as though ten additional years had gone over my head, instead of only a few weeks. My servants scarcely knew me; but when I was recognised, the glad tidings of my return flew from mouth to mouth. I waited not even to quench my raging thirst before I was again in the embrace of Azima, my own loved one, and peril was once more forgotten.

We assembled in the evening; and as the pockets of our saddles were one by one unripped, and their contents heaped on the floor before us, a glorious pile indeed met our view, of lumps of gold and silver, the produce of the jewels we had seized, which we had melted down as we got them. There were a few strings of pearls, one of which I laid aside for the Rajah; and the whole was then weighed, valued, and

distributed. Those whom we supposed to be dead were not forgotten ; their shares were laid aside, and afterwards delivered to their families.

I now again enjoyed peace and rest ; all idea of joining Cheetoo or any other of the Pindharee leaders, was out of the question ; for though I might have done so under an assumed name, yet the chance of being recognised would have been too great, and I was rich enough for the present. Cheetoo too had reached the summit of his fame and his prosperity ; his plans were all frustrated by the rash and sudden rise of the Mahratta powers. All they could do was of no avail against the skill and bravery of the Europeans ; one by one they were conquered ; and Cheetoo, though he might have profited by the generosity of his enemies, and accepted a large estate which he was offered by them, could not curb his restless spirit. A few of his men followed his fortunes, but his standard was in vain raised for fresh adherents. These even deserted him one by one ; his prospects were blasted ; he became a miserable fugitive ; and pursued from haunt to haunt, from fastness to fastness, he at last perished miserably by a tiger, in the dense jungles about the fort of Asseer Ghur. Peace be to

his memory ! he was a great man, and a skilful and brave leader ; and whatever crimes he may have committed in his wild career as a Pindharee chieftain, his dreadful death has been some atonement for them.

I pass over two more years. Why should I fatigue you, Sahib, with a relation of daily occurrences, monotonous in themselves, and presenting to my memory not one incident worthy of remark ? I will again lead you to the road, and to further adventures.

But, Ameer Ali, said I, did you never hear aught of Motee and your other companions who were seized by Cheetoo ?

I had forgotten them, Sahib ; theirs was a sad fate, as you shall hear.

One evening, about three months after my return home, as I was sitting in the Dewan Khana of my house, surrounded by some friends, an attendant brought me word that a man was without, closely wrapped in a sheet, who desired to speak with me. " He will not enter," said he ; " and says that you will know him when you see him."

I took up my sword and followed him. It was dusk, and I did not recognise the features of the person who had sent for me ; indeed he

was so closely muffled that I could hardly see them.

“What is your purpose, friend?” I asked, as the man did not speak, but motioned with his arms under his cloth for my attendant to go away. I bid him begone.

“Jemadar,” cried the figure when we were alone, “do you not know me?”

“The voice,” said I, “is familiar to mine ears; step into the light that I may see your face.”

“No, no!” said the man, in a hollow voice, “I cannot bear the light; mutilated and disgraced as I am, the darkness scarcely hides my shame: I am Ghous Khan.”

“Ghous Khan!” I cried, in amazement; “he is dead, he perished at——”

“It is even so,” said the man with a melancholy voice; “Ghous Khan is before you: to prove it, send for a light and look at me.”

I brought one myself and held it to his face. I was indeed shocked. Ghous Khan *was* before me, but oh how changed! His features were worn and sunken, the brightness of his eyes was dimmed, his beard was matted and uncombed, and a few dirty rags covered his head; but what above all shocked me was, that his

nose had been cut off close to his face, and the skin of his cheeks and mouth had been drawn together by the healed wound, so that it was tight over them, and imparted to his features a ghastly expression.

“My poor friend!” I exclaimed, embracing him; “how is this? how have you been reduced to this condition? Speak, for the love of Alla! and tell me what you have suffered.”

“The disfigurement of my face is not all, Meer Sahib,” said he, throwing off the dirty, ragged sheet which covered him. “Behold these!” and the poor fellow held up to my view the stumps of his arms: his hands had both been cut off between the wrist and the elbow, and the wounds were scarcely healed. Having done this, he sunk down on the floor in an agony of grief and shame.

I raised him up, and comforted him as well as I could. I ordered a bath for him, and clean apparel, had his wounds dressed by a skilful barber, and after seeing him eat, or rather fed with a hearty meal, I left him to his repose.

I need not tell you, now that one of my lost companions had arrived, how I longed to hear the fate of the rest. That night I was sleepless and restless; but the next day, closeted with

me in a private room apart from observation, he gave me the following account of his adventures and sufferings : adventures indeed there were few, but sufferings many.

“ You of course remember, Meer Sahib,” said he, “ that fatal night when, just as we were on the point of making off with our booty, we were attacked. The darkness favoured your escape, but on the first onset of the Pindharee horsemen I received a severe spear wound in the back, which threw me from my horse. I was seized by the Pindharees, bound hand and foot, and carried to the tent of Cheetoo, where there was now a large concourse of people assembled. The wound in my back was staunch-ed and bound up, and in a few moments afterwards other Pindharees entered, bearing Motee-ram, who was desperately wounded in the head, and the two others, Nuzzur Ali and Ramdeen Singh, who were untouched. Hidayut Khan was there—the villain and traitor! and his triumphant glance quailed under mine when I fixed my eyes on him and would not withdraw them.

“ Silence was ordered, and Cheetoo demanded with a loud voice of Hidayut Khan, whether he knew any of the persons before him.

“ ‘I do, Nuwab,’ said the wretch ; and he named us one by one, and pointed us out.

“ ‘And what have you to say against them ?’ asked the chief.

“ ‘I accuse them of being Thugs,’ said he ; ‘I accuse them of murder, of the murder of Ghuffoor Khan, and of fourteen other good Pindharees,—they dare not deny it.’

“ ‘Let their jemadar, as he is called,’ said Cheetoo, ‘if he can speak, answer to this.’ But poor Motee’s spirit was fast departing, he was senseless, and never spoke afterwards.

“ ‘I will reply,’ said I ; ‘I say it is a lie, a base lie ; I defy that man to bring proofs. Have we not served well in your camp, Oh Nuwab ? have we not ever been foremost in danger, and more merciful than all the rest of these murdering villains ?’

“ ‘Strike him on the mouth with a shoe ! cut him down for his insolence !’ cried several.

“ ‘Silence !’ again exclaimed Cheetoo ; ‘the first man who disturbs this inquiry, by Alla I will behead him.’

“ ‘Go on,’ he continued, addressing me ; ‘what more have you to say ?’

“ ‘Nothing, Nuwab ; I rely on your justice.’

“ ‘Justice thou shalt have; but tell me why your chief has fled.’

“ This confused me a little, but after a moment’s thought I replied stoutly,—

“ ‘Look you, Nuwab, I am a plain soldier, and cannot please your ear with fine words. My leader has fled it is true, but not from guilt. That black-hearted villain, Hidayut Khan, wanted more than his share of plunder on many occasions, and was refused it. He separated from us; we dogged him about the camp, and detected him in close conversation with a man who is known to be in your favour. This excited our suspicion. This evening we watched him to your tent; I gave the information to our jemadar; he and Peer Khan stole towards it; they lay down outside and heard his vile accusations of murder, and had only time to fly and mount their horses. We were not all prepared, and have fallen into your hands. Of what use would it have been for him to have braved your presence? the disgrace alone, to such a man as he is, would have been insupportable,—he would have destroyed himself. I know no more; do with us as you please.’

“ Cheetoo seemed struck with what I had said, and mused for a moment. ‘The proofs

of their guilt!' cried he to Hidayut Khan; 'the proofs! bring them, or it will be worse for thee.'

" 'Let their swords be brought,' said he; 'Peer Khan has made off with that of Ghuffoor Khan, but that man (pointing to Ramdeen) has one which was the property of a Pindharee who was murdered two nights ago, and other articles may be discovered in the linings of their saddles.'

" 'Show me the swords,' cried a Pindharee in the crowd; 'my brother disappeared two nights ago, and I have sought him in vain since.'

" 'They were brought. Ah! Meer Sahib, how can I tell you that Ramdeen Singh's was instantly recognised by the Pindharee, who vehemently demanded our blood from Cheetoo?'

" 'This is conclusive against you,' said Cheetoo; 'what can you say?'

" Ramdeen muttered a few words in exculpation, but they were unheeded.

" 'I beg further to represent, Peer-o-Moorshid,' cried Hidayut Khan, 'that if you have any further doubts of what I have declared to be the fact, I am ready to accompany any men you may choose to select; I will guide them to the spot where that man's unfortunate bro-

ther lies in his unblessed grave; and not only him will I disinter, but march after march beyond that one will I dig up, at one place one body, at another two, until we come to where Ghuffoor Khan and his unfortunate Saees lie, both in the same hole.’

“Cheetoo shuddered. ‘It is too true,’ said he. ‘Alas! my brave men have fallen by the base hands of these stranglers—men who ought to have purchased their martyrdom by death on the battle-field. Where are the saddles and their contents? Let them be produced.’

“This was worse and worse. Nuzzur Ali’s saddle, you may remember, was old and worn, and he had taken that of the Pindharee we last killed. The brother knew it and wept over it. In the lining was all the plunder he had got, just as we had received it; and around my own waist was the man’s humeana, with which I had replaced my own; it had his name on it written in Persian, which I had not observed. It was enough,—we were convicted; I repeated the Belief*, and gave myself up to death.

“Yet I once more uplifted my voice. ‘Nu-

* “La illa-il-ulla-Mahumud rusool-illa!”—(“There is no God but God, Mahumud the prophet of God!”)

wab!’ I exclaimed, ‘it is of no use to contend further with destiny; were we a thousand times innocent, this array of facts against us would convict us. I now conceal not that we are Thugs—followers of the blessed Bhowanee, who will receive us into Paradise. We shall die by your command, but why should that vile wretch live?—he who, for a greedy demand of more than his share, which he knew he could not receive according to our laws, has denounced us, has broken his oath, and been unfaithful to the salt he has eaten? Is he not a Thug? has he not joined me and a hundred others in our work ever since he was a boy? He cannot deny it; look at him,—look at his cowardly features convulsed by terror,—*they* show that what I say is true. If he had been, as he says he is, an honest man, why did he not cause us to be seized when we were in the act of murder—upon the very bodies? He might have done so, for the deeds, except that of Ghuffoor Khan, were committed in the first watch of the night, when the camp was awake, and every one engaged in his own business. Why did he not then denounce us? he would have been believed. But no! he wanted half of the plunder of that man’s brother; it was

denied him, as similar requests had been before, and he has become a thing for men to spit at. If we die, he should not be spared, because he is a Thug as we are, because he is a traitor and a coward!’

“ ‘Liar!’ cried Hidayut Khan, scarcely able to speak between rage and fear; ‘Liar! I defy thee to say I ever strangled a person.’

“ ‘No,’ said I to Cheetoo, ‘he was too great a coward, he dared not! and my lord may have remarked that he used the slang term to express his meaning in the last words he uttered.’

“ ‘Vile wretch!’ cried Cheetoo to him, ‘thou art worse than they—they are brave and undaunted, thou art a coward; thy head shall be struck from thy body.’

“His cries for pardon, for life, were horrible; he besought, he threatened; but of what avail was it? He was dragged to the doorway of the tent, a Pindharee stepped behind him, and, while he still pleaded for mercy, his head was struck from his shoulders and rolled forwards.

“ ‘Are you not dismayed?’ cried Cheetoo to us; ‘yours will follow.’

“ ‘No!’ cried we, one and all; ‘death must

come sooner or later, and ours is now—we fear not.’

“ ‘They fear it not,’ said he to another chieftain; ‘death would be welcome to them; but their punishment shall be worse—they shall linger out a miserable existence. Ho!’ cried he to his Furashes, ‘cut off these villains’ noses and hands, and bring them to me.’

“It was done, Meer Sahib! I alone have lived to tell it: our noses were cut off—next our hands. The bleeding stumps were thrust into boiling oil, and we were driven from the camp, there and then to perish, as they thought we should, in the wild jungles. And the other two did perish; we had no one to bind up our wounds, those of Nuzzur Ali and Ramdeen broke out bleeding several days afterwards, and they died within two days of each other. So long as we were together, we supported ourselves by begging in the villages, representing ourselves to be villagers from a distant country whom the Pindharees had brought thus far and mutilated, and we procured enough to satisfy the cravings of hunger; but we could get no one to dress our wounds, which were inflamed by the scorching heat of the weather; and, as I said,

the two died. Motee we never saw, but he must have died also, for the wound in his head had cut through the brain, and he never spoke. His was a happy fate compared to ours!

“I have wandered from place to place, proceeding a few coss a day. I have been fed, and my blessings are on those who gave me food for the sake of the Prophet. What I have suffered I cannot describe; but I am now with you again, and your kindness has obliterated it all from my memory. I will live and die with you, if you will grant enough to feed your faithful slave, who will now be only a burthen to you.”

I was deeply affected at his story. I took the poor fellow under my care, and his wounds were healed, but he never held up his head afterwards. He died before the year was ended, I believe of shame and a sense of his helpless condition.

CHAPTER VII.

“Oh what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THREE years, as I have before told you, Sahib, passed in inactivity. My father and myself were in high favour, at least so we thought, with the Rajah, who protected us and bestowed flattering marks of kindness upon us. Our revenue business was increased, we had now the management of a large tract of country, and I believe we gave satisfaction to the people as well as to their prince. The revenue was never in arrear; and many persons from distant parts of the country, hearing of our mild and equitable mode of government, came and settled with us in our villages. Our perquisites as revenue collectors yielded a handsome in-

come, and we lived happy and tranquilly. Still a restless spirit was within me; I heard of the successes of various bands of Thugs in different directions: men came and boasted of their exploits, and again I longed to be at the head of my gallant fellows, and to roam awhile striking terror into the country.

'Tis true I had gained the highest rank I could; I possessed fame; not a Jemadar or Soobehdar of Thugs could compare his actions with mine; but I vainly thought there was more to be gained, and that I had only to propose an expedition, to be joined by a larger number of Thugs than had collected together for many years. In this I was not disappointed, as you shall hear.

I have before mentioned to you the name of Ganesha Jemadar; he was always with us when not on the road, envying our quiet and respectable mode of life, which he could not attain by any means, though he left none untried. He bribed all the Rajah's court, nay the Rajah himself, to procure employment; but there was something so harsh and forbidding in his aspect, and so uncouth were his manners, that he did not succeed in what he so much longed for.

He came in despair to us, and after rating in no measured terms the conduct of the Rajah

and his officers, said that he was determined again to take to the road, for there alone he found occupation and amusement. He pressed me to accompany and join him, pictured in strong terms the booty we should gain and the glory we should win; and after many demurs and objections on my part, I finally agreed. Notice was given out to all the Thugs of that part of the country, that an expedition of great magnitude would be undertaken after the ensuing Dussera.

Accustomed as Azima had become to my temporary absences, after the period of quiet I had passed with her, she now did not oppose my leaving her, as she had done before. She thought it was some mercantile speculation which led me from home, and, as you may believe, I did not undeceive her.

Rejoiced at the prospect of again serving under me, all my old band, and many more, flocked to the place of rendezvous, which was at some distance from Jhalone. Ganesha had upwards of a hundred followers; and, finally, on the day of the Dussera, the usual ceremonies were concluded in the presence of upwards of three hundred Thugs, than whom a finer or more experienced band were never gathered under any leader.

I was justly proud of my charge ; and my father, who had accompanied me to the rendezvous, felt all his former fire kindle within him. I pressed him to accompany us, and the old man consented.

Some were for trying a new line of road, and for penetrating into Guzerat through Rajpootana. This question was fairly discussed in a general assembly, and opinions being much balanced between that route and our old one by Saugor and Jubbulpoor to Nagpoor, the matter was referred to the decision of the omens. They were consulted as I have before described ; and as they decidedly pointed to the south, no further doubt could be entertained upon the subject, and again we moved on in our old direction, to us familiar, for there was not a man among us who did not know every step of the road, and the best places for the destruction of any persons whom chance might throw in our way.

We had proceeded nearly as far as Saugor, with but indifferent success considering our large body, having only killed fourteen travellers, and got but little booty ; when one night, as my father and myself, with a few others, sat in our little tent, we heard the *ekarea*—that most

dreadful of all omens to a Thug. The ekarea is the short sharp bark or call of the jackal, uttered in the first watch of the night: in itself there is something peculiarly melancholy and appalling, but to a Thug the sound is one of horror. In an instant all conversation was at an end, and we gazed on each other in consternation and alarm. No one spoke, we all listened intently; it might be repeated, which would be worse than ever. It was; the sharp short bark was again heard, and there was but little time for deliberation: all started to their feet.

“We must return instantly,” said my father. “Bhowanee is unpropitious, or danger threatens; at any rate, to go on is impossible, for marked you not that the sound came from the very direction of tomorrow’s march?”

All agreed that it did, and were unanimous in their desire to return. Still I could not divine why the bark of a jackal should change the determination of three hundred men, and I ventured to say that I was sure it was some mistake, and that, even if it was not, we ought to proceed, since the omens had been so propitious at the commencement. “Why!” said I to my father, “were they not so? Have

we not worshiped the pickaxe every seventh day according to the law? Have we not performed all the necessary ceremonies on the death of every traveller?"

"That is all true," said my father; "but it is madness to think of proceeding. Foolish boy! you have never known a reverse, thanks to your good fortune, and the excellent advice by which you have been guided; but beware how you disregard omens—it will one day lead you to destruction. As to this matter, the designs of Bhowanee are inscrutable, and she must be obeyed!"

Other Thugs too had heard the ekarea, and many came in a clamorous body to the tent, begging either to be allowed to disperse, or to be led back to Jhalone.

Any words of mine would have been useless, for the whole band seemed infected by superstitious fear; I therefore held my peace. Our encampment was broken up instantly, and, late as it was, we that night retrograded a few coss on the road by which we had come; no fresh omen of favour was vouchsafed to us, and we retraced our steps to Jhalone, disappointed, wearied and dispirited.

A month passed in idleness; but having

formed my determination again to take to the road, I was not to be put off, and again I assembled my men and sought for omens. They were favourable, and I heartily prayed to Bhowanee that they might not deceive us again into a fruitless expedition. They pointed too to a different direction, that of the west, and we knew that between Bombay and Indoor, and indeed through all parts of Malwa, large treasures were constantly passing. We had before, as you have heard, reaped the largest booty I had ever got in that quarter, and I hoped to secure a like one again. We accordingly left our home,—one hundred and twenty Thugs under myself and Peer Khan, who still stuck to me. Ganesha had gone off in a different direction—whither I knew not; his presence was always hateful to me; why, I could not tell, and I could but ill disguise the feelings I entertained towards him.

It was too long an expedition for my father to undertake, and accordingly he staid at our village. We met with no adventures worth recording, Sahib, on our road to Bombay, for thither we were determined to proceed in quest of plunder; besides, I had heard much of its importance, and I felt a curiosity to behold

the sea and the ships of the Feringhees, which came over trackless waters from their far country. But when I say that we met with no particular adventures or any worth recording, you must not think that we were idle. Thirty-one travellers died by our hands; several escaped us, the omens being against their destruction; and, finally, we reached Bombay, with about four thousand rupees worth of plunder—enough to enable us to live respectably. In Bombay we put up in the large bazar which is without the fort; and although, from the danger of detection, we could not keep together, yet a constant communication was kept up among us, and every man held himself in readiness to start in any direction on a moment's warning. I had appointed too a rendezvous, the town of Tanah, which being close to the continent is a place where travellers congregate in large numbers previous to passing over.

I saw the sea! Day after day I went down to its edge, and gazed on its magnificence. I used to lie on the grass of the plain before the fort, and pass hours of a sort of dreamy ecstasy, looking on its varying aspect,—like that of a beautiful woman, now all smiles, and again agitated by the passions of love,—or listening to

its monotonous and sullen roar, as wave after wave bowed its crest, and broke into sparkling foam on the white sand.

I was lying thus one day, about the seventh after our arrival, meditating on our inactive life, and had almost determined to depart the next day, when a respectable-looking man came up to me.

“Salam, Aliekoom!” said he; “you are evidently a stranger, for your dress and carriage bespeak you to be an inhabitant of Hindostan. I have watched you for two days coming to this spot and gazing on the sea; have you never seen it before?”

“Never,” replied I; “my home is, as you say, far inland, and in Hindostan; you have thus guessed rightly: and to me, a stranger, can it be otherwise than that I should be struck with a sight so novel and so overpowering as this expanse of water is, which seems to melt into the sky?”

“The tones of your voice are music in my ears,” said the stranger; “I have heard many from my country (for that is also Hindostan), but never any which reminded me so strongly of my own home as yours. May I ask your village?”

“I lived formerly in Murnae, in the Sindouse

Pergunna," said I, "but now reside in Jhalone."

"Murnae!" cried the man in astonishment; but he lowered his voice as he said, "Ah, I remember now; 'tis on the borders of Sindia's country, and belongs to him."

"Not now," said I; "the Feringhees have had it ceded to them, and they possess it."

"But," said the man, changing the topic, "you love to look on the sea; have you ever been on its surface? have you visited the ships you may have seen moored before the town?"

"I have not," replied I; "I several times determined to go, but my heart failed me when I saw the frail boat which should take me. Besides, I am a stranger; no one would have admitted me were I to have gone to them."

"Will you accompany me?" said the man. "I have an idle day before me, and shall be glad to pass it in your company."

I gladly assented, and we took our way to a stone pier which ran into the sea on the outside of the fort.

I could not divine with whom I had thus scraped an acquaintance; all the Peons on the Bunder (for so the pier was called,) paid the greatest respect to my new friend; all made low

obeisances to him, and a scramble ensued among the owners of the small boats which were tied to the landing-place, for the honour of conveying us to the shipping.

He selected one however, and pushing off, we were on the bosom of the ocean. I confess I was afraid; though Jhalone was not far from the Jumna I had never seen that river, nor had I ever seen a boat before my arrival at Bombay. Now each succeeding wave, as we descended from the top of the last one, appeared as though it would roll over us; but the men were fearless and experienced, and after a few qualms I was reconciled to our situation. We rowed, for the wind was against us, close round several of the ships which lay at anchor; and at last ascended, with the permission of a Feringhee officer who was on board, the side of an immense ship, which my friend told me was one of war, and belonged to the king of England. After looking over the upper part, a small gratuity of two rupees to a sailor enabled us to proceed below to see the guns. I was astonished at their size, and at the exactness with which everything was fitted; the ropes even were twisted down into coils, like huge snakes sleeping, and the whole was a picture of

neatness and cleanliness which I little expected to have seen. But these matters, Sahib, are doubtless familiar to you, so I will pass them over. We returned to the shore with a fair wind, and as the boatmen spread a small sail, we danced merrily along over the swelling waters.

I was about to separate from my companion, and again protested my sense of his kindness, when he stopped me.

“No, Meer Sahib,” said he, “I must have further converse with you. I am much mistaken if you are not what I was once, and am still whenever I can seize an opportunity.”

I stared at him. Could he be a Thug? If he was not, he would not understand our words of recognition; if he was, I should be right. I did not hesitate.

“Ali Khan Bhaee Salam*!” said I, gazing intently at him.

“Salam Alikoom!” cried he. It was enough—he also was a Thug.

“Those words I have not heard for many a year,” said he; “they remind me of my early days, and the goor of the Tupounee.”

“Then you have eaten it?” said I.

* Literally, “Salutation to Ali Khan, my brother.” This is the phrase of recognition by which Thugs are able to make themselves known to each other in all parts of India.

“I have,” replied the man.

“Enough,” cried I; “I have met with a friend; but who you are I am as yet ignorant.”

“Have you not ever heard of Soobhan Khan Jemadar?” he asked. “You say you came from Murnae: surely I must be remembered there?”

“I have,” answered I; “those who knew you have believed you dead. How is it that you are here, and a person of authority?”

“I will tell you hereafter of my situation, but at present I have many questions to ask of you—and first, is my good friend Ismail Jemadar alive?”

“My father!” said I, “surely he is; the good old man has attained a fine age, and is well.”

“Shookur Khoda!” cried he; “but you said he was your father; surely he had no children—he was not even married when I left.”

“Ah,” said I, “so it might have been then, but here am I to speak for myself.”

“And Hoosein, his and my friend, does he too live?”

“Alas, no; he died two years ago, full of age and honour.” (I have not mentioned this event to you, Sahib, but it had taken place soon after I returned from my Pindharee expedition.)

He continued to ask after many of his old friends, and at last inquired how many men I had with me.

I told him, and he was somewhat astonished at their number.

“Well,” said he, “you are here, and it will be hard if I cannot find some work for you. I have told you I am a Thug, and have been so from my youth; my father and ancestors were Thugs before me. But, many years ago, I came here as the servant to a Sahoukar of Indoor. I liked the place, and not long after got employment as a government Peon, in the service of the English. They have been kind and generous masters to me; I have served them well, and have risen by degrees to the rank I now hold, which is that of Jemadar. Why I left my station as a Jemadar of Thugs is perhaps unknown to you?”

I replied that I did not know.

“It was in consequence of a foolish quarrel with your father,” said he. “We were on an expedition, and I thought he assumed too much; we were both young men, of fiery blood,—we had a sharp altercation, and both drew our swords: he was my superior, and I feared that he would condemn me to death. I

fled, entered the service of the Sahoukar as one of his escort from Indoor, and you see what I am. Yet I have never forsaken the Thugs whenever I have met with them. I am too old to seek adventures myself, but I put the young and active in the way of them, and thus have kept up my connexion with them; not, it is true, with those of Hindostan, for a feeling of shame has hitherto prevented my doing so; but since Bhowanee has thrown you in my way, you shall not regret it. My acquaintance has been with the Thugs of the Dukhun, and I have headed one or two expeditions towards Poona, when I could get leave of absence for a while from my duties. But when I could not do this, I have secured bands of travellers for my associates, and they have been successful. I have too, by the share of the booty I was entitled to, been able to purchase the goodwill of those who could befriend me; and your servant Soobhan Khan enjoys a high character among the Sahib-logue for honesty and fidelity."

"I do not doubt it," said I; "your appearance insures respect; your manners are courtly: and how could it be otherwise?"

Thus conversing, we reached his house; it was not far from where I was residing; and, as

he told me afterwards, he had discovered who we were, and had followed me from place to place, until he got an opportunity of speaking with me unobserved. From this time, as you may believe, Sahib, we were sworn friends. I listened to his details of roguery (for rogue he was in his heart,) with great interest, and I accompanied him several times to the durbar of the gentleman with whom his duties were connected. He was evidently a person well thought of, and as far as his office was concerned, that of keeping the peace, was zealous and active. Still there was something forbidding to me in the way he now followed his profession of a Thug; and as we became more intimately acquainted, he unfolded to me his plans and operations. I cannot tell you, Sahib, of their extent. He introduced me to the Jemadarş of Dukhun Thugs who scoured the roads to Poona, to Nassuk, to Sholapoor, and Hyderabad; to others from Guzerat, who were engaged in that part of the country,—but all under his control, and from all of whom he exacted a high rate of tribute as the price of the information he was able to give them, as to the despatch of treasure in various directions by the sahoukars and merchants of Bombay.

I had remained with him a week, and our stock of money was sensibly diminishing. What was to be done? He had promised assistance in giving me information of the despatch of treasure in our direction, and I had hitherto waited in expectation that he would fulfil his promise. I was tired too of Bombay; the season was advancing, and I hardly thought we should reach Jhalone before the setting-in of the rains. I therefore went to him, and frankly told him our money was running short, and that in a place like Bombay, where my men were exposed to so many temptations, they could not be expected to keep what they had; I was therefore anxious to depart, and, if he could give me no hope of any speedy booty, that I should set off in two days, and take my chance on the road.

“My plans are not quite matured in your direction,” said he. “I have heard that one of the greatest traders to Indoor and Malwa is about to send not less than two lakhs of rupees thither. I know that the Rokurreas are hired; but as yet I cannot say whether they carry hoondees or money. Three days ought to determine this, and in the meantime, as you want money, a thousand rupees are at

your service, which you can repay me, with interest, at three per cent. per month, on your arrival at Jhalone. I will trust to your good faith as the son of my old friend."

"I am obliged to you," replied I; "but the money is not quite so necessary as I said. I believe every man has some twenty or thirty rupees in his possession; but it was to prevent their spending this that I spoke to you as I did. Only say that within a week we may start, and my men will be careful."

"Certainly," said he, "before a week's time; come to me tomorrow evening after prayer-time, and you shall have further news about your bunij."

The interest-eating rascal! said I, as I left him. He a true believer! Strange I have never heard of him from my father; but I will ask him about the fellow on my return home, and doubt not I shall hear some evil or rascality of him. Not a rupee of his money will I touch, the kafir! A Thug to take interest from a Thug—who ever heard of it? I dare say he is as bad as the villainous Bhutteara we killed at Saugor. Nor was I wrong, Sahib. I became intimate with a Dukhun Jemadar who was waiting for bunij, who told me that he ground

the Thugs unmercifully, threatened to denounce them if they ever demurred, and got from them double the share he would have been entitled to had he shared the risk and the danger on the road.

“But,” said the Jemadar, “there is no doing without him, much as he oppresses us; he throws the most valuable booty into our hands, which we never could get scent of by ourselves; he has a number of Thugs who are his servants, and whom he pays liberally to get him information; he possesses the confidence of the sahoukars, as he assists them to smuggle; they pay him too for a kind word now and then with the Sahib-logue. In fine, he is paid both by them and us, and he contrives to sell all our valuable plunder.”

“Then his receipts must be enormous,” said I.

“They are,” said the Jemadar, “and we all grudge them to him; but still he protects us, and we could not do without him.”

“Has he ever been treacherous?” I asked; for, by Alla! I was inclined to mistrust the rascal.

“There are some stories of the kind,” he replied, “but in the main he is to be trusted.

Still, as I said, if he were not, we could do nothing without him; he knows every Jemadar of the Dukhun, and could if he chose blow up the whole system tomorrow; but it does not suit his interest to do so, and we are all his slaves."

"Long may ye continue to be so!" cried I to Peer Khan when he had left me; "but as for us, brother, 't is the last time he will catch us here. What say you?"

"Certainly," said Peer Khan; "these fellows are never to be trusted; they exist everywhere, in all shapes: they are zemindars and potails of villages; they are fakeers and bhuttearas; they are goosaens, sahoukars, servants, and mutsuddees; nay, the Rajah of Jhalone is one himself. They are an evil 't is true, but we could not do without them."

"I have done so as yet," said I, "and, by Alla! I will never trust one of them."

"May you never have occasion, Meer Sahib." And the conversation dropped.

I went as I had promised, and found Soobhan Khan in high glee. "I have secured the bunij," said he. "Are you ready?"

"I am. What are your orders?"

"Listen," he replied. "I was right in saying the sum was two lakhs. Contrary to my

expectations the sum is in gold and silver and jewels; there are about ten thousand rupees in hoondees (bills), but that is all. Now before I tell you more, we must make our bargain."

"Speak," cried I; "I am ready to give anything in reason."

"Ay, you are my old friend's son, so I must not treat you as I do the others I associate with," said he; "from them I get a third of the whole, but from you I ask only a fifth. A fifth will be twenty thousand rupees. Will you give it?"

"With pleasure," said I. "You may trust to my word; directly I get the money, and reach Jhalone, I will purchase a hoondee on Bombay, and send it you."

"Capital!" cried he; "you are a man I like to deal with; no unnecessary talk, no haggling like a bunnea, but you speak like a soldier as you are. Now give me a promise under your seal that I shall have the money, and I will detail the plan to you. The paper is a mere matter of form, and I am methodical."

I objected to this, and his brow darkened; I saw it, and instantly altered what I had expressed: "Get me writing materials, and I will write it out."

“What! you write? a Thug write? But never mind, since you are able to do it, so much the better; there will be no need of a third person.”

I wrote the paper, and handed it to him, having sealed it with my seal; he folded it carefully up, and tucked it into a fold of his turban.

“Now we are all right, Meer Sahib. This treasure goes under the escort of fifteen Rokurreas; they have three camels, and will be disguised as soldiers, going from Poona to Indoor. They left this place yesterday, with part of the treasure; the rest is at Poona: from Poona they will go to Nassuk, where you will fall in with them: trust me, my information is correct to the minutest particular. I know the sahoukars who send it; I have spoken with the Rokurreas; and to ensure your being unsuspected by them, here is a pass written in Persian and Mahratta, signed and sealed by the English officers of customs here. It represents you as persons who have come from Benares in charge of goods for a sahoukar, by name Hurree-das, and directs that no one shall molest you on your return. The men who brought the goods are still here, and likely to remain till

the end of the rains. Their leader's name is Futih Mahomed, so Futih Mahomed you must be if you please; he too is about your own age and appearance, and thus you will be better able to personate him. You see I have laid a good plan, and I leave all the rest to your own judgement. Make the best of your way to Nassuk; wait there four days, and on the fifth you will see your bunij, if you keep a proper look out. Now go, make your preparations, and may Bhowanee send you success. Remember Soobhan Khan, and return as speedily as you like; I have no doubt I shall have found fresh work for you."

"You may depend on me, Khan Sahib," said I; "I will not be long away from you. Your plan is an admirable one; and Inshalla! your twenty thousand rupees are as safe to you as though you even now had them in your possession."

"Remember me with many kind words to your father, Ameer Ali," continued he; "would he come thus far to see an old friend, and forgive him for the past?"

"Of that I have but little hope," said I; "he is old and infirm, and never leaves his village: but he shall write to you."

“Enough, enough,” said the Khan; “I have much to accuse myself of in the past; but ’t is a long time ago, and he has most likely forgotten my foolish conduct.”

I left him, but made an inward determination to be guided entirely by my father’s counsel as to whether one cowree of the twenty thousand rupees should be paid or not. “And,” said Peer Khan afterwards, “twenty thousand rupees—the old villain! *He* get it! Ah, Meer Sahib, we shall be the brothers of owls and jackasses if he ever sees one rupee!”

The next morning we were on our return to Jhalone, and we halted between Bombay and Tannah for the day. Our pass was of much use, for it was respected and obeyed; and the day after we passed Tannah and the different revenue guard-houses without interruption.

CHAPTER VIII.

1st Murd.—I am strong framed, he cannot prevail with me.

2nd Murd.—Spoken like a tall fellow that respects his reputation ; come, shall we fall to work ?”

RICHARD III. act ii. sc. 4.

“SHOOKUR Khoda !” cried Peer Khan, as he rushed into my presence on the fourth day after we had arrived at Nassuk ; “Soobhan Khan was right—they are come !”

“Are you sure, Khan ?”

“Certain,” he replied ; “the description we had of them tallies with what I have seen in every point. Come and see yourself ; there are the camels and the men disguised. But I could have sworn, had I met them anywhere, that they were Rokurreas ; they have the air and bearing of the tribe.”

“Enough,” said I, “*you* cannot be deceived. They do not know we are here, and we will do the same as we did at Boorhanpoor. Get the men ready; we will go round the town, travel a coss or two, and enter by the same gate they did: we will then put up in the bazar with them.”

We were all shortly in motion, and, as I had planned, after going round the outside of the town, we entered it on the other side, and were soon in our new quarters in the bazar.

Travellers soon get acquainted. The shop I chose adjoined the one they occupied, and I had quickly scraped an acquaintance with the Jemadar of the Rokurreas.

Narrayun Das, for that was his name, was a tall and very powerful man; he had small twinkling eyes, and long straight eyebrows, which, by binding his turban tightly over his temples, he had drawn up in diagonal lines to either side, and this imparted to them a very peculiar expression: long mustachios, which were twisted out to each side, and thick bushy whiskers; and his whole appearance proved him to be an experienced Rokurrea, and one to whom deceit and stratagem were familiar. I shall have a cunning hand to deal with here,

thought I, as I scanned his features ; no common pretences will go down with him ; but have him I must and will, ay, and his two lakhs too. Two lakhs ! it is worth an effort were he Roostum himself. Yet he was not slow in forming an acquaintance with me. Our salutations passed in due form, and after we had all cooked our morning meal, and sat on our carpets, we soon entered into familiar conversation.

“ A pretty business Bajee Rao has made of it,” said he, as I had asked him the news from Poona. “ The coward ! had he but put himself at the head of his army when the fight took place at Kirkee, he might have annihilated the Feringhees.”

“ And do you wish that he had ?” said I.

“ Certainly ; what do we know of them ? While they confined themselves to the fort of Bombay it was all very well,—and I remember the time when they had hardly a foot of ground beyond it,—but now, little by little they have advanced, until they have upset the Mahratta empire, and are in a fair way to take it.”

“ But,” said I, “ Bajee Rao has a good army, all the country is his own, and surely he will do something. The Mahrattas are good

soldiers, and he has leaders of renown with him."

"He will do nothing, Meer Sahib; he will run from place to place, and his army may fight if they can or will: he will never draw a sword. The cowardly wretch has not the soul of a flea."

"Well, Jemadar, to me it matters little; I have forsworn soldiering, and find that I can get a good livelihood by escorting treasure and goods. I am just come from Benares, and the sahoukar who employed me has sent for more, which I am to bring down to him."

"Ah!" cried he, "so you are in that line. Well, it is a good one if you have plenty of men, but a sorely troublesome and difficult one if you have few. I speak from experience, for I am in the same business myself. I have been lucky, but my poor brother was otherwise; he fell by the hands of thieves between here and Indoor; we heard of him from Boorhanpoor, but beyond that we could get no tidings of him."

"Strange!" said I: "I never heard of thieves on the road, though my kafila would have been worth plundering. But now I am under the protection of the Sahib-logue, I care not; they

will soon have all the country, and there will be no danger in another year."

"Under the protection of the Feringhees! how do you mean? I thought you said you served a sahoukar."

"So I do," I replied; "but to ensure my safe return his friend Soobhan Khan got me this pass, which he said would be respected throughout the country;" and I pulled out the document, which I had carefully folded up in wax-cloth, and showed it to him.

"You are fortunate, Meer Sahib, and particularly in knowing Soobhan Khan, who is a worthy man and one deservedly respected; I have known him for many years; he has always been a good friend to me, and has got me employment when I most required it, by becoming security for me to a large amount. But you said that you had given up soldiering; in this you have been wise; far preferable is it to gain an honourable livelihood than be marched in all directions, with but little pay, and hard fighting for that. With whom have you served?"

"You must not tell any one," said I; "for every man who has served the man I have would desire it to be a secret, and perhaps the knowledge of my former life might be against

my present interests. I served under Cheetoo Pindharee, and led three thousand of his best horse."

"Under Cheetoo!" cried the Jemadar; "this is most strange; and you are not joking?"

"I am not, I swear by your head; I dare say I could find some papers to convince you of the fact if you doubt it. But, as I said, I do not like to tell any one."

"You need not fear me," said he, "I am as close as a Rokurrea, and you know the saying is proverbial; but you must have seen strange adventures and strange lands, for they say he got nearly to Madras, and left the Feringhees' country a desert behind him."

"I shall be glad to tell you some of my adventures, Jemadar Sahib, and perhaps they may interest you, though it hardly befits a man to speak of his own deeds."

"Nay, there is nothing to be ashamed of, Meer Sahib; and as for being a Pindharee, the best in the land were with him; and a gallant army they were when the first Lubhur assembled at Nemawur."

"Then you were there?"

"I was. I brought some treasure from Indoor and Oojain to the sahoukars at Nemawur,

and saw the whole of the preparations for the campaign ; and Bhugwan knows I was so taken with the appearance of the whole, that could I have got a horse, I verily believe I should have turned Pindharee myself. They say every man filled his saddle with gold and pearls."

"We were lucky enough," said I, "especially in the first expedition. Had you come to Nemawur before the second had set out, you would have heard of me ; I had a good name and a high rank. In the first I was nobody, and gained Cheetoo's favour solely because I was a better swordsman than any in his camp."

"Then I have heard of you," said the man ; but surely you cannot be that Syud Ameer Ali who was only second to Ghuffoor Khan ?"

"I am the very person, and no other," I replied ; "true, my rank is fallen, but whose has not ? Cheetoo is dead ; Ghuffoor Khan has disappeared, and is supposed to have gone to Hyderabad ; Syud Bheekoo is God knows where ; and Shekh Dulla still roams about the hills between Boorhanpoor and Ellichpoor, with a price set on his head. No one knew much of me, and I suspect, so long as I behave peacefully and follow my present calling, no one will ask after me. I had enough of being a Pindharee

after the second foray, and got to my home at Jhalone as soon as I could. If the others had been wise, they would have sought their safety as I did."

"Yes," said the Jemadar, "Cheetoo's was a sad fate—he deserved a better: but they say the Sahib-logue offered him a Jagheer,—is this true?"

"So I have heard," said I; "fool that he was, he would not accept it; but no wonder, his whole soul was bound up in his plans for driving out the Feringhees. He thought the Mahrattas would beat them; and when they had gained the first victory, he was to have joined them with fifteen thousand horse, and become a great commander. I should have followed him too, had they been successful; but they were not, nor ever will be, and I am what you see me."

"A strange history," said the man, "and you have told me more than I ever knew before. Had the Peshwa and the Rajah of Nag-poor played their parts as well as Cheetoo, all would have gone right; but it is useless to think of them, and I suppose we must make up our minds to our new masters. Now, how-

ever, you and I, Meer Sahib, must not separate. I am going to Indoor for some treasure, and your best way lies through it; I will keep with you, for your party is a large one, and, to tell you the truth, I don't like passing those jungles by the Sindwah Ghat with my own. The Bheels are taking advantage of the present disturbances to be all in arms. Bands of deserters from the Peshwa traverse the country in all directions, helping themselves to what they can; and they are not over scrupulous either. So we will keep together, if you like, for mutual protection."

"I shall be glad to do so," said I; "though I have nothing to lose, except two or three thousand rupees, and whoever comes to take them will get more blows than money."

"And I have still less," said he: "I have only enough to pay my expenses and feed my camels; but I am no great hand at fighting, and am not mounted as you are, to run from danger."

But the heavily laden pack-saddles belied his words. I was not to be deceived, and felt as sure that the coveted treasure was there as that the Rokurrea who guarded it was before me.

We shortly afterwards separated ; and when I was alone with Peer Khan I told him what I had said, and how I had deceived the Rokurrea. A long and hearty laugh we had over it.

“ But I fear for you, Meer Sahib,” said he. “ Compare his power and your own slight frame. You must risk nothing now.”

I laughed. “ His power, Khan !” I said, what is it to that of many who have fallen under my hand before now ? Besides he is the brother of the Rokurrea we killed beyond Boorhanpoor, and he must be mine at all hazards. I would not miss this adventure for thousands.”

“ I will tell you what,” said Peer Khan, “ it will never do to kill them so far from Indoor ; let us get them as near to the city as possible, and we shall be the nearer our own home. This matter will cause a stir, and we had better not risk anything.”

“ Well, be it as you will. I had intended to have killed them near Boorhanpoor, and then to have turned off directly into the hills ; we should never be followed.”

“ Ay, and risk Shekh Dulla and his party, who are out ?” said Peer Khan ; “ that would never do. He would plunder us ; and as he

knows us, would most likely serve us as Cheetoo did the poor fellows who were caught."

"Astaffur Alla!" cried I, shuddering. "God forbid! no, your plan is the best. We will entice them out of the towns before we have gone many marches, and then they are our own when and wherever we please."

I pass over our journey, Sahib; all journeys are alike devoid of interest, and only one routine of dusty roads, parching sun, (for the Rokurreas would not travel by night,) bad food, and discomfort of all kinds. We met with no adventure, except being robbed of trifling articles at different places; and we fully succeeded in persuading the Rokurreas to encamp with us, as we adhered to our old custom of preferring the outside of the villages to entering them, where, besides the additional fear of thieves, there was more dust, more dirt, more heat, and continual squabbles with the villagers. My men had behaved admirably. No one could have told, from the broad patois they spoke, that they were aught but what they represented themselves to be,—Benares-walas, and Bhojpoorees: they looked as stupid a set of owls as could well be collected together; but they played their parts, to a man, with the extreme

caution and cunning on which rested the success of our enterprise.

After all, Sahib, cannot you now understand the excitement which possesses the soul of a Thug in his pursuit of men? Cannot you feel with us, as you hear my story, and follow us in my recital? Here had we kept company with these Rokurreas for twenty days; we had become intimate; they told their adventures, we told ours; the evenings passed in singing or telling tales, until one by one we sunk down wearied upon our carpets. Cannot you appreciate the intense interest with which we watched their every movement, nay, every word which fell from them, and our terrible alarms, as sometimes our minds misgave us that we were suspected? Yet still we stuck to them through everything, they were never lost sight of for a moment, and, above all, their minds were kept happy.

As to their leader, he was delighted with me. My accounts of my adventures as a Pindharee, the plunder we had got, the towns we had burned and sacked, all were to him interesting, and day by day I told him of new exploits. He used to sit, and the rest of his men too, listening with unfeigned pleasure to the

accounts which I and Peer Khan gave. Cunning as they were, at heart they were honest and simple, and they readily believed all we told them.

But their time had drawn near. Indoor was five marches further, and delay was now impracticable and useless; besides, to insure their safe arrival, I knew they had determined on going thirty coss in one march, and my men could not keep up with these hardy fellows. "Come what will," said I to Peer Khan, "they die tomorrow night."

The time came. We were sitting, us usual, under the same noble tamarind-trees; one by one we had sung our song or related our adventures; and who could have guessed, had he seen us thus engaged, that a work of death was to ensue? Every tongue was employed, and the hearty laugh which broke at times from one or other of the assembly, showed how light and merry were our hearts,—we, at the certainty of our success, the Rokurreas, at the thought that the peril of the road was past, and that their large amount of treasure would reach its destination in safety; there was not a grave face among us.

"There," cried the Jemadar of the Rokurreas,

“there is the moon; when she has risen over the trees yonder we will bid you farewell, kind Meer Sahib; we have been happy in your company, and free from alarms and danger. Bhugwan grant that we may hereafter journey in company, and as safely as we have done! Thanks to your care in protecting us outside the villages, we have not lost a cowree; and we have been taught a new mode of encamping, which we will follow in future. The moon will last us the whole night, and we shall have twenty coss of ground behind us by the time you wake from your night’s sleep.”

The Thugs had taken their places; to each Rokurrea were four stout men allotted, and I marvelled that they should have thus allowed themselves to be separated from each other. But they had not suspected; who *could* have done so?

The moon rose majestically above the distant trees; her full, round, and yellow orb cast a mellow light upon our group. The Rokurreas rose with one accord, and each turned to the men he was near to give them his parting benediction and salutation.

“Nay,” said I, “we part not thus, Narrayun Das; let us separate as friends; receive my em-

brace; we are friends and brothers by profession." We embraced, and before the others could press forward to salute me, I gave the jhirnee: "Pān lao!" I exclaimed.

It was enough. The Jemadar fell beneath my own handkerchief, and a few shrieks and groans told the rest—all had died.

"Haste ye, my good fellows," cried I to the Lughaees; "the same bright moon which was to have served these fellows shines brightly upon us; quick with your work, the camels are ready, and a few hours will see us safe from pursuit, though indeed none is to be apprehended from this small place."

The bodies were stripped; every fellow had a heavy humeana, besides what was laden on the camels. We stopped not to count our money, but hastened on when the interment was finished; and only tarrying for a few moments at the next village we came to, to purchase the goor for the Tupounee, we found ourselves in the morning nearly twenty coss from the scene of our last night's adventure.

We halted till the evening, and again pushed on, but by a different road; and leaving Indoor about fifteen coss to the right, we directed our course to a small village named Dehalpoor.

From this, leaving Oojein also to the right, we hastened on, always travelling by night on account of the extreme heat of the weather, and by way of Buhadoorgurh and Aorcha, we reached Jhalone in safety. No alarm had we but one. The revenue officers on the frontier of Holkar's dominions insisted on knowing who we were, and what we had with us; and so strict were their inquiries, that, had it not been for the English pass I had with me, we must have been suspected and apprehended. But, thanks to Soobhan Khan, it was not questioned; as Futih Mahomed I passed free. A duty, or rather an exaction, of fifty rupees was levied on the treasure, and a fresh pass given to us, by which we escaped further questioning and detention. Who can describe my father's joy at seeing the treasure! the old man was in ecstasy: he kissed me, he embraced me, called me by every endearing name, and extolled my conduct in glowing terms to Ganesha, who happened to be with him. It was easy to see, however, that to that worthy they might well have been spared. Jealousy possessed him, which he could ill disguise, and I verily believe, had he dared, that he would have informed the Rajah of the treasure we had secured. In

the memory of the oldest Thug no such booty had ever been gained, and I was classed by the Thugs with Jhora Naeck and Kuduk Bunwaree, fabled votaries of Bhowanee, of whom stories were told which, though implicitly believed by most, nay all of our fraternity, I never credited. But it was enough for me. I had never met a reverse, and every Thug of Hindostan, I verily believe, only thought he must join me to secure to himself a booty which would support him for years.

I have forgotten, however, to mention to you an incident which befel us at Buhadoorgurh. We were encamped outside the town, and late in the evening we saw a body of men, whom we at first took to be Thugs, coming towards our camp.

“Who can they be?” said I to Peer Khan; “they look like Thugs, yet it is late for any party to be out.”

“Some straggling party, I suppose,” said he; “I will go and see.”

“If they are Thugs and you know them,” I added, “bring them, but say not a word of our booty.”

“No, no, I am not such a fool,” said he laughing; “but I will bring you the news.”

He went, and returned with the leader of the party. I had purposely kept in my little tent, in order that my face might not be seen in case they were strangers, and to conceal it effectually I tied a handkerchief over my mouth and chin.

“Salam Aliekoom,” said a gruff voice, as a man with Peer Khan entered the tent.

“You are welcome, friend,” said I; “sit down.” He was evidently weary with travel, and seated himself slowly.

“Your name?” said I; “and who are you?”

“My name,” replied the man, “is well known, I dare say, to most people, and they are afraid of it. I am called Lall Khan, or familiarly Lalloo.”

“I have not heard it before,” said I; “but who are you and your men?”

“Oh, we are free traders, who help ourselves to what we can get with a strong hand.”

Some wandering Pindharees, thought I; and I asked him if they were such.

“Not exactly,” said he; “we are Dacoos.”

“Worse and worse,” said I laughing; “and I suppose you are from Delhi?”

“Ay,” replied he, “even so; we know you,

though you do not know us. We know you to be Thugs by your encampment—but never fear us;—brethren should not interfere with each other; we have different ways of helping ourselves to spoil, but what matter? we are brothers in a general sense of the word.”

“Good, we are; and if I can help you, say so.”

“In no wise,” said he, “but to give us room among ye for the night; we will be off early, if you do not go the same road.”

“Room ye shall have, Khan, till the moon rises, and food too, but after that we are off; we travel northwards.”

“Then it cannot be helped,” he replied; “we will stay here till you go, and occupy your ground afterwards; we shall not be suspected.”

“And where are you going?” I asked.

“To Hyderabad,” said the man. “No one suspects Dacoos to be out at this time of the year, and we shall have the whole road to ourselves; we shall return after the rains, about the Dussera, by the Nagpoor road. Now we are going by Bhopal and Boorhanpoor.”

“And your luck?” said I; “have you had

good bunij?" (for this word was understood by them, and is common to all classes of people who do their work on the roads).

"Middling," said he, "neither good nor bad. We have had a few affairs, but nothing to boast of."

"Well," said I, "you have taken a good line; the road from Boorhanpoor to Hyderabad is a good one, and you will be in Sikundur Jah's country, where no one asks questions about the people who are left on the highways. I wish you good luck, and my friend will look after your comforts; you must excuse me, as I am in pain from a swelled face and toothache."

"Salam!" said he, as he departed: "If you were going instead of returning, we might get good plunder in company; we Dacoos are rare hands at rough work."

I had spoken in a disguised voice, and it was impossible he could recognise me again if he met me. I did this for an object which occurred to me at the moment, as you shall learn hereafter. I mentioned this meeting to my father. "What hinders us," said I, "from meeting them as they come up? they will be laden with spoil, and will be an easy prey. Brave and

reckless as they are, they have no wit, and will never find us out."

"I don't know that," said my father; "they are not so stupid as you think; I know much of them, have killed some of them, and they were cunning enough. Several gangs of them have escaped Thugs by being able to detect them. However, I see nothing objectionable in your plan; and at any rate it will furnish excuse for a new expedition."

"Ay," said Ganesha, who was present, "let us go: I long to see the Meer Sahib act. We hear so much of him, that, by Bhowanee, perhaps an unlucky old Thug like myself may pick up something new. Will you let me come also?"

"Certainly," said I; "but you will see no more than you know already; lucky I have been, but you know my pretensions to knowledge are very small, and I have never boasted of them. To my perception the whole art consists in having a smooth tongue in one's head; and a man who is a good Bhuttote rarely makes a good Sotha."

"Yet you are both, Meer Sahib," said Ganesha, with a malicious grin; "and your men would follow you to the death."

"So they will," said I; "for I am kind and

considerate to them, and reward them handsomely."

This stung him to the quick; for he was a rough bully, and, though perhaps one of the best Bhuttotes then living, was no hand at inveigling travellers; and as he always persisted in being a Sotha himself, he was notoriously unlucky; but few men too would serve under him. He was preparing to retort sharply, when my father stopped him.

"Let him alone," said he; "he is a proud boy, and bickerings among us lead to no good: you must not think on what he has said."

"Nay, Ismail," said he, with the air of an offended child, "I care not what he says: pride will have its fall, and I may live to see it."

I was very angry, but there was no use in saying more. Had we been alone he should have answered for it.

So you see, Sahib, out of a trifling incident a new expedition was determined on. We all prayed it might be more favourable than the former one which was planned in that direction, and I confess that my success in the last had strengthened my faith in the efficacy of the omens, though as yet by no means

established it. Experience, they say, is always bought at a costly price, and is bitter when you have got it, and I had to buy mine, though the time was not yet come.

But Soobhan Khan, who was he? said I to Ameer Ali; and did you pay him his price of blood?

Not a cowree of it, said Ameer Ali; but you shall hear. I asked my father who he was, and detailed the whole of my adventures with him; he remembered the man the instant I spoke of him.

“The rascal!” cried my father; “and is he so rich and honoured, the son of a vile woman? To think that he should be in such a situation, the scoundrel! But the deeds of Alla are inscrutable. Listen, my son, to his story, which can be told in a few words.

“He and I were Jemadars together. I never liked him, and he had a bad reputation; he was never a good Bhuttote, for the fellow was an arrant coward, but he was a capital Sotha, and his smooth tongue gained him more bunij than we could gain by straightforward work. Well, many years ago we joined together, he to be Sotha, and I to manage the other work. We had killed a large body of travellers

near Jeypoor, for we had a numerous gang. Two were sahoukars, and the booty was large. Among it were some pearls and precious stones; they were given over to his party as their share, and he said he would go to Indoor to sell them; but I had lent him nearly a thousand rupees at different times, when he had no money to make advances to men to induce them to serve under him, and I pressed him for some of the pearls, which I wanted for my wife, in payment of the money. This was late one night, after we had divided the spoil; he said he would give me them in the morning, when I could pick out the strings I liked best; and he spoke so willingly, that I, fool as I was, never doubted him. That night he absconded, and I never heard of him till this extraordinary account of yours. Pay him!" continued my father, "not the value of a broken cowree shall he ever get; in any other man I might have pardoned it, but in him the conduct was ingratitude in the highest degree; for had I not assisted and upheld him, he would have been neglected and have starved."

This then was the secret of Soobhan Khan's wealth; he must have sold his pearls one by one, as he had hinted to me that he had traded

in them, and raised himself by bribery to the state he was in. Of course I neither sent him his money as I had promised, nor wrote him a line to say that I had arrived safely at Jhalone. I destroyed his pass too, as it might have led to detection.

CHAPTER IX.

“ *Prince Henry*.—Where shall we take a purse tomorrow, Jack?

Falstaff.—Where thou wilt, lad; I’ll make one; an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.”

HENRY IV. Part 1.

I HAVE told you of my popularity among the Thugs, and when it became known that a new expedition was planned, and would set out after the Dussera, so many men offered themselves that I was obliged to reject numbers, and select those whom I knew, from experience and character, would be likely to behave best. Among them were a few who were excellent musicians and singers. I had before, on many occasions, felt the want of such men, to amuse travellers with whom I had fallen in; and these were particularly acceptable to me at the present time, as the expedition was a large one; and the country being quieter and more settled than it

had been for some years, we were assured that the roads would be full of persons of rank and consequence travelling to and from their homes. In order that our band might have the greater appearance of respectability, I begged of my father to accompany us, for his venerable appearance and polished manners would, I was certain, do more to ensure us success than all our most cunning stratagems.

Nor was I neglectful of the Rajah ; from time to time I visited his durbar, and was always received with the greatest civility and attention, as indeed I deserved ; for not only was I a good servant to him, but as numbers of Thugs had settled around me in different villages, the revenue they paid for his protection and connivance at our work amounted to a handsome sum yearly ; and I need not say it was punctually paid, for upon this mainly depended our concealment. In the last expedition, however, I had pleaded poverty on my return, and though I could have well spared five thousand rupees from my own share, I was content with presenting as my nuzzur a gun I had purchased in Bombay for two hundred rupees, and a small string of pearls which I had found among the treasure of the Rokurreas ; and he seemed sa-

tisfied; but it was merely the feigned content which precedes a violent outbreak of discontent or passion. He was our bitter, deadly enemy, though he cloaked his designs under the garb of friendship, and was gradually perfecting his schemes for our destruction.

We set out. I have nothing new or interesting to relate to you of the manner in which our preparations were made and completed. Azima too, poor soul, never dreamed of what we were: it was enough for her to know that every new expedition brought her new ornaments and better clothes, and enabled her to live in a higher and more expensive manner. I had been enabled to add greatly to my house, and it was now as comfortable and spacious as I could desire. She knew too that, with increased wealth, she could look for a higher alliance for our daughter, our only child; and she had even now received proposals of marriage for her, some of which were in every way advantageous, and with persons unconnected with our profession, of which I was glad; for knowing full well that one mischance, or one traitor among us, would hurl me at once from my prosperity, I was desirous of marrying her to some one who could protect her, and be free

from any dangers similar to those I was myself exposed to.

I however bade Azima wait, because (as I told her) the journey I was about to undertake would be infallibly prosperous, and a fresh addition to our already ample means would enable us to have the marriage ceremony performed in a manner fitting or perhaps exceeding our pretensions. She readily acceded to my request ; for if there be one thing more than another about which a matron of Hindostan is solicitous, it is the marriage of her child ; not as regards happiness I must own, though perhaps there may be a lurking wish that she may be happy ; but the main matter is, that her clothes shall be of the best and richest materials, her jewels many and of value, and the whole of the establishment which she takes to her new lord of the most substantial description ; that they may last her for years, and procure for her mother the goodwill of the female members of her husband's family. Nothing is productive of more quarrels among the females than that anything should appear indifferent ; remarks are made, and reproaches are bandied about between the united families, and out of these soon grows an enmity which never cools. Many a mar-

riage, which promised well at its outset, has been marred in its joyous termination by fault being found with the equipments of the bride, which are always submitted for inspection to her female relations before they become her own property for ever.

But I am digressing, and must return to my own adventures. We left Jhalone as before, upwards of three hundred Thugs, under my father, Ganesha, Peer Khan, and myself. We gave out along the road that we were servants of the Nizam, and were returning to our service at Hyderabad after our periodical leave of absence ; this was necessary, for our numbers without it would have provoked suspicion.

Never shall I forget the first matter we took in hand; not that there was anything remarkable in the destruction of four men, but it was attended by a sad result, which damped the spirits of the party for many days afterwards, and from which *one* never recovered.

Peer Khan had a nephew, a boy of about ten years old, a noble little fellow, beautiful in his features, and intelligent beyond his years. As you may imagine, he was a great favourite among us all, and I had repeatedly asked Peer Khan to allow me to adopt him as my son, to

supply the place of the child I had lost: but he would not hear of it, for the child was the son of a beloved sister who was dead; the boy's father had also died about two years before, and Peer Khan had taken him to his home, and loved him as his own.

The little fellow rode a spirited pony which I had given him, was always in the van of the party, and amused us by his mimic feats of horsemanship and by his intelligent prattle: he could never be kept behind; and when the time came that the four men were to meet their fate, we had given him in charge to those who brought up the rear, with strict orders that on no account was he to be permitted to come on after us. Peer Khan also had desired him to keep with these people, as he was going off the road to a village at some distance, and he had promised obedience. Yet all our precautions were of no avail;—how could they be, when what followed had evidently been written in his destiny?

I had just given the jhirnee, and the four miserable men were writhing in the agonies of death, one of them too was shrieking, when, Ya Alla! who should come galloping up but Alum Khan, the boy I have mentioned. His

first exclamation was of triumph that he had caught us; but how can I tell the look of horror to which his countenance was instantly changed when he saw what was going on! His eyes became fixed, and were wide open, his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, he uttered no sound, but clasped his hands in agony; and before I could dismount, or even Peer Khan, who was superintending the work, he had fallen from his pony insensible.

“What shall we do?” cried I to Peer Khan, as we raised him up and strove to comfort him. “Speak to him; a word from you may arouse him.”

“My child, my child!” cried Peer Khan, in accents of terror and misery; “oh speak to me! one word only: you are killing your parent. Ya Alla!” continued he, raising his hands to heaven, “grant that this swoon may pass away, and that he may speak; I will feed a hundred fakeers in thy name, O merciful Prophet! if thou wilt but intercede and grant my prayer.” But it was of no avail; the poor boy lay senseless, though his eyes were fixed and staring, and not a word could he utter. The Thugs too had left the dead, and were all around us. There was a rivulet close by, in which the bhil had been prepared; I thought of water, and bid one of

the men run for some. It was brought, and I poured it into his mouth. "He revives,—his lips move!" cried Peer Khan in an ecstasy of delight—"he speaks!"

And the poor boy did speak.

"Where am I, uncle?" said he in a faint voice. "Where am I? What have I seen?"

And he passed his hands over his eyes.

"Nothing, nothing," cried his uncle; "you have fallen from your pony, that is all; you should not ride so hard, my child; you might have been killed."

"No, no," said the boy; "I did not fall. I saw—Alla, save me! save me, uncle! Oh look at their eyes and faces—there they lie—oh kill me, I cannot bear it!—I shall die."

Unhappy child! he had again seen their faces; we had never thought of the dead; one of the bodies lay close to us, the distorted features grinning horribly, and it had fallen against a bank, so that he saw it sitting half upright,—a dreadful spectacle for a child.

"Take it away, take it away!" he shouted in his infant voice. "I shall die—oh, bury me! I shall never forget the face and the eyes; they will be ever before me!"

"Away with them!" cried I; and as I turned

again to the child, he had sunk on his face in the sand of the road, and was endeavouring to hide himself in it—he was in strong convulsions.

“Alla! Alla! what shall I do?” cried Peer Khan. “Oh, Meer Sahib, by your soul, by your mother’s honour, do something. Save that child, and I will be your slave till the end of my days; I will serve you on my knees: I will be your menial.”

“What can be done?” said I. “All we can do is to stay with him, and comfort him when the paroxysm is past. He will revive soon and forget all.”

Poor boy, how he strove in his convulsions! he could not speak intelligibly, he foamed at the mouth, his lips grew livid and contracted; his eyes, when he opened them, seemed sunk into his head. I had never seen such terror before, nor could I have believed that it would have had such an effect on any one.

We carried him to the edge of the stream, and by dint of bathing his face, and forcing water into his mouth, he partly revived. He had just opened his eyes again, when by a miserable chance they fell upon one of the turbans of the dead men, with which I had been

wiping his face. It had an instantaneous effect on him; his screams broke out afresh, nothing could console him, and we were in dreadful alarm about him. What to do we knew not; we were far away from any human habitation, and even had we been near one we dared not have called in any hukeem to see him, for his incoherent ravings would have too truly exposed our doings. We sat by the boy in fearful apprehensions that every throe and convulsion would cause his death; at last we raised him up, and placed him on his pony, and had succeeded in conveying him about a coss while he was in a state of insensibility; but it was of no avail. Again he awoke from his temporary unconsciousness, and we were obliged to take him down, and lay him on a bank at the side of the road, while we fanned his face and endeavoured to compose him.

But he was greatly reduced in strength, his moans were feebler and feebler, and though he now opened his eyes and gazed calmly around him, it was but too plain to us that the delicate flower had been blighted, and was fast withering under the terror which possessed him. Peer Khan was in a dreadful state; he raved, he intreated, he prayed; he knelt

down beside the poor sufferer, and bedewed his face with his tears, which were fast falling; but no mercy was shown him. We sat thus till long past midday; numerous travellers passed us, all commiserating the child's state of suffering, but they shook their heads as they left us, with a firm conviction that he must die.

And he did die! towards evening the pure spirit fled from the suffering body, and we were left alone in the wild waste with the dead.

"It is of no use lamenting now," said I to Peer Khan, as he sat, his hands clasped in anguish, rocking himself to and fro, and moaning and sobbing as though his spirit would break. "It is of no use, brother, the boy is dead, and we must carry the body on to the stage, which is not very far distant."

"Do as you will," he replied: "as for me my heart is broken; I shall never look up again. He was the life of my soul, and without him what shall I do? what shall I do?"

But we raised the body up, and at times carrying it, at others placing it before us on our horses, we conveyed it to the camp. Our absence had been known, but as its cause was also known, none of the Thugs had come out to meet us. We laid down our sad burden in

my tent, a grave was quickly dug, and it was buried by torch-light, amidst the tears and lamentations of the whole band, for the boy was beloved by all.

Peer Khan came to me in the dead of the night, and awoke me from a restless slumber, in which the dreams of the sad scene had fearfully mingled. I was glad that he had come, but not for what followed.

“Meer Sahib,” said he, after a long silence, “I am not what I was,—I never shall be again; I am broken in spirit, and am no longer fit for my profession. My fate too points against it, and after this dreadful catastrophe I should be useless to you; permit me therefore to depart. You see I am calm and composed, and I do not say what I now urge on you in passion or grief; therefore let me depart. I will go to my home, and in solitude endeavour to make the remainder of my life acceptable to Alla, who has visited me with this affliction. Nor will it be long ere the earth covers me; I feel that this blow has shaken me to my soul, and it will bow me down to the grave.”

I saw it was useless to argue with him: his features were stamped with despair, and to contravene a man's fate is impossible. It is the will

of Alla, and what mortal can oppose it? It must have its course.

“Go,” said I, “Peer Khan; may peace be with you, and the blessing of the Prophet! I feel for you—I shall ever grieve with you; but if, in after times, your inclination leads you to join me, I need not say how gladly I shall avail myself of your services. We have been friends and brothers, and we part such, I hope, after years of a sincere and mutual affection.”

He could not reply to me—he wrung my hands, while the big tears rolled from his eyes over his manly features: he made attempts to address me, but the words stuck in his throat; and at length throwing himself at my feet, he kissed them, and embraced my knees: he then arose, and after gazing on me for a moment, with features working under the effects of suppressed emotion, he rushed from my presence for ever—ay, for ever! When we returned to Jhalone he was dead: his grief had killed him!

He had been more to me than any of my other companions, and deeply I sorrowed over his untimely fate.

I said this event threw a gloom over our party, which did not pass away for many days;

but gradually the men assumed their wonted cheerfulness, and again the song, the jest, and the tale were heard in our merry and light-hearted camp. Nor was the more serious part of our object neglected. Within a march or two of Jubbulpoor, we had heard that a Moon-shee, stated to be a man of great wealth, was travelling before us to Nagpoor, and we made an effort to overtake him. We effected this a march from Jubbulpoor, on the Nagpoor side, and were now entering on our best ground; I say our best, as there were but few inhabitants in that miserable country.

We overtook the Moonshee, but had it not been that we were nearly three hundred Thugs in number, we should have hesitated to attack so large a party as his. He had two good-sized tents, horses, camels, a palankeen and bearers, and servants; and we deliberated long over the matter.

The omens however, having been consulted, were found to be favourable, and therefore we hesitated no longer, but now laid our plans to effect an object which promised so much plunder.

We encamped close to the Moonshee for two days; of course this led to intercourse: hearing

that we were respectable persons, he sent to my father and myself to come to him on the second evening, and we went. The Moonshee was in the employment of the Europeans ; he had served with the force at Jalna, under General Doveton, though we could not make out whether he was a servant of that officer or not ; but he spoke of him in such terms as led us to suppose he was. He told us that now the country was settled, he had obtained leave to go to Hindostan, and was returning with his wife and child. We spent a pleasant evening with him, for he was a man of extensive information, and amused us with many anecdotes and accounts of the Feringhees, of whom he spoke in terms of the highest praise, and undeceived us as to many particulars we had heard of them, and materially removed many of our prejudices against them. I respected them more from what he said than I had ever done before ; for though every one acknowledged they were good and brave soldiers, it was said they were vicious, and debauched, and drunken. At one or two questions of mine the Moonshee laughed immoderately. I asked him once why the Europeans eat with knives and forks, and spoons, instead of with their fingers, which God had given them.

“Yes,” said my father, “old as I am I have never been able to find this out. Tell us, for you know, as you have yourself seen them eat.”

“Tell me what you have heard,” said the Moonshee, “and I will give you an answer.”

“It appears so extraordinary,” said I, “that I can hardly believe it; for why should not all men be the same? Nevertheless, I have heard, and from what I thought to be good authority, that their finger-nails contain poison, and therefore they dare not risk the chance of their drawing blood, nay more, of touching their food.”

How he laughed! I thought he would never have ended; and I felt nettled that my remark should have given rise to such immoderate mirth. I could hear too, from the tittering behind the division of the tent, that the women were also provoked to merriment at my expense. At last he said,—

“No, no, Meer Sahib, this is folly. Who could have told you such a lie? What if their skins be white and their faces ruddy, are they not the same flesh and blood as we are? They eat with spoons and knives because it is the custom of their country, and because they do not like to soil their hands; besides, their style

of cookery is different to ours ; for instance, they roast half a sheep and eat it, and how could they do so without the implements they use ?”

“I confess my ignorance,” said I, “and am ashamed to put any more questions to you about them, so shall believe henceforward that all I have heard are lies.” Yet I longed at the same time to ask more about their drinking scenes, and the meaning of the words, Hip ! hip ! hip ! which I fully believed to be of mystic import.

It was late when we separated, but before we did so we agreed to travel in company, and to pass our evenings together. This was what we wanted ; our success was inevitable should we succeed in getting him on one or two marches further, as the villagers there knew us, were our friends, and for a small consideration would keep themselves to their houses, and allow us to do what we liked. I have not mentioned this before, Sahib, for you very well know that it is the case. We have friends wherever we go ; we bribe all we can, and have our agents in every part of the country in the disguise of fakeers or merchants. Some zemindars fear us, others bully us, and extort large sums from us, but they are generally faithful ;

and without their help and connivance do you think we could effect anything? We could not. In the Nizam's country particularly we are well aided. Many of the zemindars have Thugs in regular pay, whom they have been in the habit of sending out on the road: some are content with a certain sum a year; others, who fear so close a connexion with us, now and then pretend to arrest us, and get as much as they can; and as there is no police of any kind, they are not afraid of their dealings being brought to light. I myself know but little of how these matters are managed there,—I mean from personal experience,—but I have heard from others, and in particular from Motée, who led a gang of Thugs for some years all over the Huzoor's dominions, and told me, that so long as he paid the potails of villages, the zemindars, and the revenue servants *handsomely*, he had no obstruction; that hundreds of others did the same, and practised their profession so openly, that they often never took the trouble of burying the bodies of those they destroyed. You know that this is truth, Sahib, and therefore I need hardly mention it. But to my story.

We reached the village we wished to gain—a

miserable hamlet called Biseynee ; but the Potal was in our interest, and a present of twenty rupees now and then, with sometimes a new turban, gained us his silence and cooperation. I say cooperation, for he often gave over passengers to Thugs, by declaring that his village was unsafe, and that they must go and encamp outside with the rest—who were the Thugs. He knew well what would become of them ; but he was, as I have said, paid for his treachery.

Well, we reached Biseynee ; I had purchased for the worthy Potal a handsome turban and waistband, and had prepared for him a number of other articles, one of which was an English pistol, which he had sent word by a Thug that I was to purchase for him. As soon as I arrived, I went into the village to him, and in his own house tied the turban on his head, presented him with the gifts I had prepared, and added a purse of twenty rupees.

“Ha !” said he, “what now, Meer Sahib ? you are not used to be so liberal. What bunij have you that you are come with it to my poor place, to give it a worse name than it has already ?”

“Oh none,” said I carelessly ; “you know I have not been this way for some years, and

these are to prove that I have not forgotten you."

"Thanks for your kindness; may your condescension increase," said he; "but the bunij, Meer Sahib? You are a cunning gentleman; I know you of old. Who is he in the tents yonder? and why have so many Thugs collected here? You cannot conceal your designs from me."

"Nor do I wish it," said I; "but remember our old compact."

"I do, I do," said he hurriedly: "but times are changed, and with them my masters. Know you not that this country belongs to the Sahiblogue?"

"And what of that, Potailjee?" said I; "what difference does it make?"

"None," he replied, "to *me*; but have you not seen the horsemen?"

"What horsemen?" cried I.

"Six," said he, "and a Duffadar. My poor village it seems has a bad name for thieves, and they have sent a party here to guard it. Alla help us, and keep the bread in our mouths!"

"And the Duffadar, what is he like?"

"He is a Hindoo," said the Potail, "and a

Bhojpooree ; he is called Hittah Singh ; his men too are all of his tribe."

"Bhojpoorees!" said I ; "then I dare say they are Thugs. What Bhojpooree was ever an honest man?"

"No, they are not Thugs, Meer Sahib, for I have tried them with the pass-word. But between you and me, I think my friend Hittah Singh only wants an opportunity to be as great a rascal as I am myself,—may Alla pardon me!"

"I have no doubt of it," said I. "Where is he?"

"Shall I call him?"

"Do so," said I. "If I cannot persuade him, I will bully him ; and if the worst comes to the worst, you know we are more than three hundred to six, and they would have but little chance."

"True, Meer Sahib ; but no violence I pray ; have some consideration for my good name. If the Europeans heard of violence having been done, they would turn me out of my place."

"And you would turn Thug I suppose. But quick, Potailjee, call the man here."

He was absent for a short time, and returned with a short mean-looking fellow, and I could

plainly see that rascal was written on his countenance. You know the old proverb—‘Chor ke daree men, Tinka’ (there is always a straw in a thief’s beard). Salutations were exchanged, and I came to the point at once.

“Look you, Duffadar Sahib,” said I to him, “you may have guessed what we are?” He nodded assent. “This is good,” I continued, “as perhaps you may have guessed at our object.”

“Partly,” said he; “but what do I know about you?”

“Exactly,” said I, “the very thing I want; you need know nothing, and you will have nothing to tell if you are ever asked. Take my advice, and remain quietly within your village, and if the earth turns upside down you are not to stir out. For this you shall be well paid. But if you molest us, remember we are three hundred to seven—fearful odds, my friend.”

“Nay, I am wise,” said he; “what Bhojpoo-ree is not? Nor do I wish to interfere. Do what you like; neither I nor my men will stir a foot.”

“Can you depend on them?” said I: “can they be close?”

“As close as you wish them to be, Jemadar; but we must be paid.”

“Certainly,” said I; “I would not have it otherwise: but the reward depends on what we get.”

“Say two hundred rupees,” said the fellow; “it is worth your while.”

“Well, it is a bargain, Duffadar,” I replied, “and the Potal is witness. And now I will give you further advice, which is that you are to know nothing and see nothing, if even the lord Sahib were to ask you. You are to know only that travellers came and departed, and you kept no account of them.”

“Of course,” said the fellow; “I know this of old. I have met parties of your people in my own country, and have no reason to be dissatisfied with them: they have always behaved like men of honour, and kept their words with me.”

“Then we are agreed?” said I.

“Certainly: you will see nought of us, and I will come to you at night for my money.”

“You had better come now, Duffadar, as I think we shall move on after it is all over.”

“Do you go, Potaljee; it would not look well for me to go with the Syud Sahib. Do you go and bring the money.”

“Come then,” said I, “we are losing time.”

“Shall you return soon?” asked the Duffadar of me.

“I know not,” I replied; “but it is probable. At any rate, as this country always produces good booty for us, you will see us here pretty often.”

“The oftener the better,” said he; “and I must continue to keep my station here; it would be hard to lose such good friends. You, Potailjee, can help me to a few low-caste rascals from time to time, to send in as thieves we have caught.”

“Certainly,” said the Potail, “there are plenty of Gonds and Dhérs in the country; every one knows they are thieves; and if they may not immediately have committed any robberies, they have been engaged in them some time or other, so that it is all the same. I will get you a few from time to time as you want them.”

“Now and then I shall require a few,” said he, “just to keep up my character and appearances, and a few years in irons will do none of them any harm: the government will take care of them.”

I could not help laughing heartily at the cool manner in which this was proposed and accepted. But it was the truth, and I know that

it was, and is now, a matter of every-day occurrence. Many a Duffadar of police has won a good name with his officers in this way, and for one guilty man he has seized a dozen innocent people. Who cares about Mangs and Dhérs? they are always villains and robbers.

CHAPTER X.

“Good sir, you have too fair a shape to play so foul a part in.”

FLETCHER'S LOVE'S PILGRIMAGE.

“THAT is a Bhula Admee (a respectable man),” said I to the Potal, as he walked to our camp; “he suits my purpose exactly.”

“He has been on the look-out for some of you,” said he, “for a long time. We have never spoken openly on the subject, but he has hinted as much many times. And I suspect he chose this post, if he had any choice in the matter, because he was likely to meet Thugs here. If you pay him well, he will help you materially.”

“Do you think I have given enough?” said I.

“Quite,” he replied; “I don't think he expected you would agree to so much.”

“It is certainly a large sum,” said I, “but it is the first, and the money is well spent.”

“But you have forgotten me, Meer Sahib: am I not to partake of your bounty?”

“Of course, Potailjee. What I brought was only a trifle, I have more for you in the camp; you shall have your share.”

“How much, Meer Sahib? I want money; my rents are in arrears and I am in distress.”

“Thirty rupees,” said I.

“Make it fifty, I beseech you. You know not in what a strait I am; I cannot borrow the money, and you have been sent by Alla for my deliverance. You will lend me the money if you will not give it me? and you will have good bunij in this business.”

“Well,” said I, “you shall have it, but on one condition. We may not be on the road when some people whom we are looking out for pass this place: they are Dacoos; they have some Tattoos with them, and great wealth. If they pass either way, you must send men after us with a letter.”

“I will send my own sons, well-mounted,” replied he; “they will easily find you out, and you may depend on me. Where will these fellows come from?”

“They have gone to Hyderabad now,” said I, “and will return by Nagpoor. If we meet them, all very well; but they may escape us.”

“They shall not, by Alla!” said the Potal. “I will watch for them myself, and if you get them I shall hope for a handsome present.”

“I will not forget you. But here we are at the camp: take care no one sees the money as you carry it away.”

“Trust an old hand for that,” said he, with a knowing wink. “I must go after I have got it to the Moonshee, who has sent for me about fodder for his horses. I should like to see him too—to see a man whose breath is in his nostrils. And he has a wife too.”

“Yes,” said I, “there is no getting her out of the way, so she must die, which is a pity. He has a child also, about four years old, which I want myself; he is a pretty boy, and I have no son to bless me; he will never know the difference between me and his father after a few days.”

I paid the money and dismissed him. Ganesha came to me.

“I have been looking at the ground,” said he, “and there is a hole near the Moonshee’s tent which has been dug for some purpose or

other, apparently the commencement of a well; it will save us the trouble of digging; the earth too lies close to it, and will only have to be filled in."

"Have the Lughaees seen it?" said I.

"Yes," he replied, "I took Bhowanee with me; he says it is the very thing."

"Now, Ganesha," said I, "how shall we manage?"

"Oh, do you take the tent work, and leave the rest to me; I will settle all outside. You have a smooth tongue, and the Moonshee is alone; I will be close at hand in case of anything going wrong; but I do not apprehend anything."

"Nor I either. None of the Saeeses or camel men must escape: there are many of them."

"Sixteen in all; I have counted them: let me see—eight bearers, two camel men,—one of them has a wife,—two Khidmutgars, one female servant, and four Saeeses: how many is that?"

"Eighteen," said I.

"Ah, well, it does not matter; towards evening I will surround the whole; most of them will be listening to the songs, and the

rest we must overpower in the best way we can. The night will be dark too, which is in our favour."

I then told him of the horsemen in the village, and what I had done. He knew Hittah Singh, the Duffadar, and told me that in his excursions into the district of Arrah, in Bengal, he had met with him; and that on one occasion, when he had been arrested for murder, this Hittah Singh had got him off, by swearing to the collector that he knew him, and by being security for him to a large amount. "He is a good fellow, for a Bhojpooree," said Ganesha, "but requires to be well paid, and you have given him enough to keep him quiet."

The evening came. My father and I went to the Moonshee's, but after the evening prayer time; he had his son on his knee, and a noble little fellow he was. How I shall love that boy! said I, inwardly, as I looked on his fair and beautiful features and expressive eyes: he came to me readily, and I fondled him, and displayed to his admiring eyes my beautiful sword and dagger. Azima too will love him, thought I, and he will supply the place of our daughter when she is married and gone from us.

“You have no children?” said the Moon-shee; “or perhaps I ought not to ask, you may have lost them: your brow darkens at the question.”

“One,” replied I, “a daughter. A son, the counterpart of the Sahib Zada, it pleased Alla to take from me when he was about his age.”

“It is indeed his will,” said the Moon-shee; “there is no striving against fate. This boy is my only offspring; for many years I had been married, and my case was somewhat like that of the Sultan in the ‘Story of the Parrot;’ grey hairs were coming, and I despaired, but at last Alla was gracious, and you see the boy.”

“May God grant he live a hundred years, and be prosperous,” said I. “I have no hope myself.”

We conversed together for some time, and on a message being given from without, I said, “You have been so pleased with the singing of some of my men, Moonshee Sahib, that they have arranged a little masque, after the manner of the Byroopeas, which they are anxious to perform before you. It will be absurd enough I dare say, yet it will serve to pass the evening, and your son too may be amused.”

“By all means,” said he; “anything in the jungle is acceptable; but for your company, Meer Sahib, we should have had a dull march. I will prepare those within, so pray call in the performers.”

The men came, six stout fellows dressed fantastically, two of them as women, with sitars and drums in their hands; they personated a body of Goosaeens, and danced and sung in a ridiculous manner. Where they had learned their parts I know not, but the whole was well done, and the Moonshee’s little son laughed immoderately. As we had expected, the whole of the Moonshee’s people gathered round the tent, which was open on one side, to admit of their seeing the Tumasha; and I observed with secret exultation that every man had two or three Thugs close to him, and one in particular behind each of them. All was ready as I thought, and I was about to give the signal, when one of the Thugs called to me that I was wanted without. What it could be I knew not, but excusing myself for a moment I went out.

“What shall we do?” said Ganesha to me in a voice full of alarm and apprehension: “Meer Sahib, the Feringhees are upon us!”

“The Feringhees!”

“Yes,” he replied; “and what can we do? this good bunij will escape us. Of course the Moonshee will join them, and we may then as well think of strangling the king of Delhi, as of getting him.”

“But how,” said I, “how are the Feringhees upon us? Have you seen them?”

“No,” said Ganesha, “but I have seen their people. A long string of camels have just arrived, with I know not how many red-coated sepoy to guard them,—my curse be on them all!”

“And where are they?”

“Why, they are gone into the village. They wanted this ground, but I told them I would not give it up; that the Moonshee was a gentleman of rank, and could not be disturbed, and that there was better ground on the other side of the village.”

“Then never fear,” said I; “the work must be done immediately. I will go in and give the jhirnee; and if any of those prying rascals the Lascars come about us, you know what to do. But I fear not; the Potail will help us, and Hittah Singh too, and there need be no great noise. My father will have to personate

the Moonshee for awhile if necessary, but that does not matter."

"Good," said Ganesha; "but be quick, Meer Sahib, I shall be in a torment of apprehension until the whole are fairly under the ground."

I left him, and carelessly playing with my roomal, again entered the tent.

"What is it?" asked the Moonshee.

"Oh nothing," I replied; "only some Sahib-logues' tents which have arrived. Their servants wanted this ground to encamp on, but seeing us here, the Lascars have taken them to the other side of the village. The troops will be here early tomorrow."

"That will suit me exactly," said he; "I will stay with them, and bid you gentlemen farewell; but that is no reason why we should be the less merry. I warrant these good fellows have another song or two in store. Have you?" he asked of them.

"A hundred," replied one of them; "but perhaps the next will be rather a noisy one."

"Never mind," said he, "play on; you shall have as good a reward as I can afford to bestow."

I waited till the noise was at its height to give

the jhirnee, yet I had not the opportunity I wished for. The Moonshee sat with his back to the kanat, and to get behind him was impossible; one of the Thugs saw my embarrassment, and relieved it, by begging him to rise and advance a few paces.

“What are they going to do?” asked he.

“I know not,” I replied, “but you had as well comply.”

He arose, and I slipped behind him. “Now!” I shouted; “bring the pān!” and my hand was on the Moonshee’s neck. One wild shriek he gave, and fell.

His wife had been looking on through a hole in the kanat; she had seen the work, and rushed out into the midst of us, with her boy in her arms. I shall never forget her—never: I shall never forget her wild look and her screams. I tore the boy from her arms, and left her in the midst of the Thugs; I ran out into the air, and the first person I met was Ganesha, his face flushed with triumph, which I saw by the glare of the torches from the tent.

“All is done!” cried he; “they have all fallen. Two I killed myself. Where are the Lughaees? we must be quick.”

He ran on; and I stood in the open space before the tent. Parties of Thugs passed rapidly to and fro, bearing the bodies of the dead, which were one by one thrown into the hole. But the singing and music went on as merrily as ever, and looking into the tent I saw my father sitting in the place which had been occupied by the ill-fated Moonshee.

My little charge was crying terribly, imploring me, in tones and words that would have moved any one's heart but mine, to take him to his mother. I soothed him as well as I could, and was going to my tent; but curiosity impelled me to return, and see the hole in which the business of interment was going on. I went to the edge; Ganesha was standing by it encouraging the Lughaees; he saw the boy in my arms.

“What folly is this, Meer Sahib?” said he; “you are not going to spare that boy, when we are even now in such danger!—it will be madness. Give him to me; I will silence the crying wretch, and send him with his parents.”

“Never!” cried I; “the boy is mine; you may have all the spoil, but give him up to death I will not. Have I not lost a son, and is it not lawful to adopt a child of this age?”

“Madness! madness!” cried Ganesha, “the boy must die. Are you a fool, Meer Sahib, to risk such a chance?”

“He will never find out the difference between us and his parents,” said I; “and I will not be interfered with.”

“Fool!” said Ganesha, setting his teeth, “I spared a child once, and will never spare another; I have sworn it on the pickaxe.”

“I care not for a thousand oaths,” I cried; “the boy is mine, and you had better not oppose me if you wish to avoid a quarrel;” and I was going away.

He caught me by the arm.

“Let me go,” I exclaimed, and I felt for my dagger, “or by Alla! I will strike this steel into you.”

“Boy,” cried he, “you are mad; I fear you not; talk of daggers to others than Ganesha; he has seen too much of you to fear you. Give me the child I say, his very cries will alarm the sepoy.”

I felt for my dagger or sword, but I had left them in the tent; I tried if pity could move him.

“Have you no compassion?” I said more gently: “Ganesha, have you no pity for a child? Can you bear to kill him?”

I was off my guard, and he saw his opportunity. Quicker than thought he had rudely snatched the child from my arms, and as he hurled him into the pit, he cried scornfully, "Pity! no, I know it not. Now go and cry, Meer Sahib, for the loss of your plaything."

I started forward, and leaned over the edge of the hole, which was being rapidly filled; the poor boy lay senseless and dead at the bottom, —one shriek alone had escaped him, as he was dashed with passionate force into it. I gazed for an instant to satisfy myself that he was dead, and some of the earth which was being thrown in hid him almost instantly from my view.

I turned to Ganesha in savage anger.

"Dog!" cried I, "and son of a dog! you shall answer for this. Had I my sword now with me, I would cut you in two pieces."

"An idle threat, and one befitting what I have heard of you," said he. "Go, Meer Sahib, you are a boy and a fool: I do not fear you."

Stony-hearted villain, he had destroyed my son. Situated as I was I could then do nothing, but I was determined to have my revenge: and I took it too. I mentioned what

had occurred to my father and to three of my intimate associates : they were determined to stick by me whenever I chose to attack Ganesha, and would fain have done so the next day ; but this did not suit me, though his words rankled in my heart, and the deed he had done made me hate him more than ever. I deferred my revenge to the last moment, but I took it, as you shall hear.

We staid on the ground that night ; the palankeen had been broken in pieces and thrown into the hole, but my father personated the Moonshee the next morning as we rode through the camp of the Feringhees, which had been pitched so near us, that indeed I have often wondered they heard not the cries of the party as we despatched them. But we had taken good precautions. The noise of the drums, and the confusion occasioned by letting loose two of the Moonshee's horses, which were here and there pursued by a number of Thugs, shouting and screaming after them, had drowned the cries of our victims, and we had effected the whole without suspicion. Our good friends, the Potail and the Duffadar, had kept the Sepoys in conversation, and they had not

noticed the noise, beyond hazarding a passing remark as to its cause.

Again therefore we were on the road. We had not got all the booty we expected, it did not indeed amount to three thousand rupees, and we earnestly looked out for the Dacoos, who were we hoped to be our next bunij.

We went on to Nagpoor, and sold the Moon-shee's camels and horses. Here the gang divided; one part under a Jemadar named Emom Buksh took our old road towards Oomraotee, and through the valley of Berar to Khandesh and Boorhanpoor; the rest of us returned by the road we had come, after staying four days in the city of Nagpoor.

On our second or third march homewards we overtook the Dacoos. They had been seen by our spies the moment we entered the village we had encamped at; and as much caution was requisite in managing them, my father at once proposed to be alone the Sotha, or inveigler.

"I shall feign to be a Hindoo," said he; "these rascals will suspect me if I go by my own name, and indeed they would know me. I will be a Rajpoot Jemadar, come from Hyder-

abad, and you shall see I have not forgotten my old trade."

Accordingly he painted his forehead and breast after the fashion of the Hindoos, covered his eyes with wood-ashes, put on a waistcloth and dress he borrowed from one of the men, and attended by another went into the village.

How anxiously I expected his return! I feared he would fail in his mission, but Ganesha was confident. "He never fails," said he to me; "he is one of Bhowanee's own favourites; nothing he ever did failed. Would that I had his luck."

But he was absent so long, that I became apprehensive for his safety, and was on the point of setting out to gain tidings of him, when to my great joy I saw him approaching. I ran to meet him.

"What news?" cried I; "oh, my father, my liver has been burnt during your absence. Why did you stay so long?"

"Never mind, my son," said he, when he had dismounted, "you would have been wrong to come after me. But ah, the owls! I have entrapped them,—they are ours."

“Ul-humd-ul-illa!” cried I, “this is rare news; but how did you manage it?”

“Why,” replied he, “it was done easily enough, though I feared for my success when I saw that one of the Dacoos was a fellow I had known a long time ago; however he did not recognise me, thanks to my white beard and these marks of the infidels: he never thought I was Ismail Thug. I sat and conversed with their leader, who told me very gravely he was a servant of the English going to Hindostan on leave of absence. I said I was one also, and had come from Jalna, where I was a collector of duties on spirits. We then became intimate, and the upshot of the whole was, that we agreed to travel together; and by Alla! if the omens are good, they shall die tomorrow. Delay is useless with these fellows, for they evidently think, (from the signs I saw them making among themselves, which are known to me,) that we are certain bunij to them, and if we do not attack them they will fall upon us.”

“We shall need good hands,” said I; “and I will take the leader.”

“I will be a Bhuttote also,” said Ganesha: “I never killed a Dacoo. Are they stout fellows?”

“Very,” answered my father; “but like all their tribe they are heavily armed, and can do but little against us, if we manage properly.”

“We had better fall on them with our swords,” I observed.

“Not so, my son, but we will surround them, and if there is not a good opportunity, the men can use their weapons.”

We were soon agreed on this point; and in the morning the Dacoos joined us as we moved round the village into the main road. They were twenty-five in number, stout, but heavy-looking men, armed to the teeth, with their heads enveloped in folds of cloth. They had with them thirteen tattoos heavily laden; and it was well they had this encumbrance, as it served to separate them, as each tattoo required a man to drive it. Had they kept in a body, we could have made but little impression on them, and dared hardly to have attacked them.

“Now, look out!” said my father to the men; “if you see them leaving their beasts and collecting in twos and threes, fall on them at once, or they will attack us: they know well enough who we are, though they pretend they do not.”

We journeyed on in company : after I had ridden for some distance I dismounted, and walking beside the leader I entered into conversation with him. He did not recognise me in the least, and very gravely began telling me how he had met with Thugs on his way down ; how he had fought with and overpowered a large band, and carried off their plunder, amounting to some thousand rupees.

I could have struck him on the mouth with my shoe, but I refrained : yet it was enough to have provoked me, being so barefaced a lie. Still I applauded his bravery, and he continued : “ Yes, Meer Sahib, these Thugs are the greatest villains unhung ; and I praise the Prophet, that I have gained some information about them, which I will give to my masters the Europeans. The fool of a Thug, or rather one of his people, told me they belonged to Jhalone ; I am going that way, and if I do not tell the Rajah of their being in his city, call me an owl, and a father of jackasses. I expect too he will reward me handsomely.”

Ay, you will tell him, thought I ; but you must get there first, my friend. Mashalla ! words are one thing, but deeds are another.

“And were they such fools?” I asked; “all the world say that Thugs are never to be taken in.”

The fellow laughed scornfully.

“Never taken in!” said he; “did not I deceive them? They are swine, they are asses; they murder poor travellers, but they have no wit, not so much as children. Their fool of a Jemadar tried to deceive me by wrapping his face in a cloth; but I saw him, dark as it was, and could swear to him among a thousand.”

“What was he like?” inquired I; “I am curious to know, if it were only to avoid him in future, especially as I am a constant traveller on this road: but you said you attacked them?”

“Yes,” said he; “I am an old traveller too, and as we were a large body, and the Thugs not more than treble our number, I said to my companions that, though I knew we were with Thugs, they ought not to fear, and if they would only watch me, we might attack and disperse them, and get their plunder: and by Alla! we did, Sahib. Late at night we rose on them, killed some, and the rest ran away, among them the cowardly Jemadar. We got

enough too to take us to Hyderabad comfortably."

So we had a narrow escape, thought I; these fellows would have attacked us, I doubt not, had we not gone on that night. But the lie, Sahib, was it not an impudent one? Yet I could not help laughing heartily at his relation, which he swore was true, by Alla and the Prophet, by my beard, and by every saint in his calendar.

We trudged on till we came in sight of two trees on the road, on which travellers hung bits of rag as offerings to the guardian saint of the place. I saw very plainly that this was their bhil; one by one they began to forsake their tattoos and collect. More delay on our part would have been fatal, and my father saw this. He was as prompt as I could have desired: he had seen their movements, and just as I had disengaged my roomal from my waist, he gave the jhirnee. Eleven of the Dacoos fell at the same moment, the leader by my hand. I had my roomal round his throat, and before I gave the fatal wrench, I shouted in his ear that I was Ameer Ali, the leader of the Thugs he had met, and that *then* I had sworn to kill him, and had done it. The rest were cut down

with swords: my men were prepared, they were not, and were heavily encumbered. Yet had we delayed for another three or four hundred paces, they would have fallen upon us, and I think, Sahib, the Thugs would have run away. As it was, however, we were victorious; we threw the bodies as they were into the jungle, and pushed on, laughing heartily, and in the highest spirits at the issue of our adventure. The booty too was good—thirteen thousand rupees worth of gold, silver, and ready money met our admiring eyes, when the packages of the loaded tattoos were opened for our inspection.

Well, Sahib, we had proceeded as far as Sehora on our return, when we fell in with a great European, who was also travelling. We did not fear him, but on the contrary determined to keep with him, because we well knew that he had many travellers in his train who profited by the protection of his troops; so we divided into two parties, one under myself and my father, the other under Ganesha. Our object was to separate the travellers from him, and we hoped, by representing the inconvenience they were put to by delay on account of his slow marches, and the scarcity of provisions

they would experience on the road, to induce them to accompany us. I need not follow the adventure further, for it differed not from the rest; suffice it to say, that after a few marches a large party of travellers had joined with us. We left the high-road to proceed by footpaths through the jungles, and near the village of Shikarpoor we selected the bhil. The place was a favourite one, and well known to our party. The travellers fell, twenty-nine men, some women and children; all were buried in one grave, for the spot where they were killed was a desolate one. The deed was done in the night, but by the light of as fair a moon as ever shone on us. One child I saved from the general slaughter; Ganesha was not present to oppose me; and though the boy was a Hindoo, yet I determined to adopt him as my own, and to bring him up in the holy faith I professed myself, and this would enhance the merit of having spared him. But when his mother died, I could not force him away from the body; he clung to it, young as he was, with frantic force—he screamed and kicked whenever I attempted to lay hold of him, and bit me in the arms and the hands. I thought, if the body was removed from his sight, he would

be quiet and submit to his fate; but no—when it was gone, he grew worse and worse; nothing would pacify or tranquillize him, and I fairly grew impatient and angry. I drew my sword, and threatened him, but he was insensible to his danger; he reviled me, he spat at me with a child's virulence. I once more raised him up in my arms, but it was of no use; he seized my ear in his teeth and bit it till the blood came. In the agony of the pain and in my rage I knew not what I did. Sahib, how shall I tell you what followed? it was the worst act of my life but one, which I have yet to tell you of.

You killed him, I suppose, Ameer Ali, said I.

Yes, Sahib, I killed him; but oh, how did I do it! it was the devil's work, not mine. I never was cruel, but now the Shitan possessed me.

Here Ameer Ali put his hands to his eyes, and finding my heart sicken, I begged him to refrain from reciting the dreadful particulars. After a pause he continued.

Wretch that I was, I did this. No one was near me but the Thug who held my horse, and even he was horror-struck, and uttered a loud

scream of terror. I silenced him, and leaving the mangled body, I mounted my horse and galloped after my party.

Yes, Sahib, I deserved to be hung for that deed, had I never done another; but I was spared for a different fate.

We were in full march on the third day after this happened, when we saw a body of horsemen coming after us. My mind misgave me when I observed them, and I hastened to collect the straggling Thugs, and form them into a close body, in case the horsemen should prove to be enemies, or make any hostile demonstration. On they came, shouting and abusing us in every term of vile reproach their tongues could utter. There were about forty of them; and I verily believe that, had I not been at the head of the band, they would have fled as one man: however I cheered them up, and was determined to show a good front in my retreat. I knew there was a village in our interest within a few coss, which possessed a worthy Potail like him I have told you of; and that if we could but reach it, we might man the walls and towers, and bid defiance to our pursuers.

“Be not afraid,” cried I to my men; “let the best of ye come behind with me, and we

will stop these marauding rascals. I know they are Pindharees, and the veriest cowards in existence. Only be firm ; you who have matchlocks take good aim, and when they are near enough, every one mark his man, and see if as many saddles are not emptied."

On they came ; fortunately the road was narrow, and had thick thorny brushwood on each side of it, so that they could not pass us. They were within speaking distance, and I shouted.

"Are ye friends or enemies ? if the former, keep behind us ; if enemies, begone, in the name of the Prophet, my friends, or ye are likely to get a sharp reception."

"Stop !" shouted the leader of the party ; "who among you is leader ? I would speak to him."

"I am leader," said I ; "come out alone and I will meet you ; but if any of ye stir, by Alla we will fire on you." The fellow advanced, and seeing that none followed him, I rode out in front of my men. "If there is treachery," said I to them, "fire,—never mind me."

"Jemadar," said the man, "our Thakoor has sent for you, you may possibly have guessed why. You had better come : you will only have

to pay a fine and will be released, I swear this to you on the faith of a Rajpoot."

"I will neither trust you nor your master," said I; "you are a parcel of vagabond Pindharees; I laugh at you, and spit on your beards. If you want us, come and take us; but of our own accord we come not. Are we fools? are we asses? Oh, man! art *thou* one to talk thus? Go back to him that sent thee, and say, the man is yet unborn who will take Ameer Ali Thug, so long as he has a weapon in his hand, or a few gallant fellows by his side. Have you no shame to deliver such a message?"

He made no answer, but urged his horse and cut at me with his sword. Fool! he did not think that a Thug could fight, and still less that he had engaged one whom no one had ever yet defeated. I caught the blow on my shield, and returned it on his head as he passed me;—the fellow fell from his horse a dead man.

My own men set up a shout and discharged their matchlocks—one horseman and a horse fell wounded, and struggled in the dust. Had only my own good companions in the Pindharee affairs been with me, I would have charged

them and put them to flight, but I could do nothing alone. We had checked them however, and retired slowly, followed by the troop, who kept out of shot, but evidently waiting for a piece of level and fair ground to charge us. In this way we retreated till the welcome walls of the village whither I had directed the main body appeared to our view. We redoubled our efforts to gain the shelter they would afford us, and the men were in some disorder as we passed over a level plain in front of the village: they were even beginning to run, but I checked them. "For the love of Alla!" cried I, "for your own sakes keep together and have brave hearts; so long as we are firm they will not dare to come near us, but if once we separate we are lost. See, even now they are preparing to charge, as a hawk stoops on his quarry." And down they came; thundering along, brandishing their spears, and reviling us: some of my men fled at their utmost speed to the gate, but most of them stood. Again I dashed at one of our enemies and wounded him, but the odds were against us; one of my own men fell, pierced through the breast to the backbone by a spear; another was wounded; but they could not take further ad-

vantage of us. Those who had fled, joined by others of my men and some villagers, headed by my brave old father, issued from the gate; which the horsemen seeing, they drew off, and we got within the village in safety. They kept hovering about till midday, but out of the reach of our shot; and soon after noon they all departed, and we saw no more of them. We had to pay for our shelter handsomely however, for the Potal shut the gates of his village and declared we should not pass out without having paid him a thousand rupees. I was for attacking him, plundering his village, and burning it after the Pindharee fashion, and we could have done it easily. But my father would not hear of it: "The country would rise on us," he said; "and besides, it would ill requite the Potal's hospitality and protection, even though we had to pay for it." So he paid the money; and after a thousand protestations of mutual goodwill, we left the village in the evening, intending to push on as far as we could, to be beyond the reach of pursuit.

Nor were we followed; though this exploit made a noise in the country, and was known far and wide, we were not molested. We heard afterwards that the Thakoor flew into a

furious passion when he heard of his men's defeat, and dismissed them from his service as a parcel of cowards, as indeed they were. Moreover he swore he would be revenged upon every Thug he might ever catch afterwards; and I believe he kept his word and put some to death. But we laughed at his beard, and many a merry jest had we over the adventure afterwards.

It seems, the day after, some herdsmen were passing the spot where the travellers had been killed, and they saw the body of the lad lying in the road: all the remains were discovered, and information was given to the ruler of the village and tract of country in which the deed had been done.

We pursued our route. Ganesha too had been fortunate; he had decoyed a large body of travellers, consisting of a Jemadar who had lost an arm, and his family, with some others, along the by-paths in another direction, and he had killed them all.

You know, Sahib, that it is forbidden to us to kill persons who may in any way be deformed. I was amused afterwards to hear the accounts which were given of the deliberations made upon the Jemadar's fate by Ganesha and

his gang: he told them to me himself when we met.

“Some, indeed most of the men,” said he, “hesitated as to whether he should be strangled or not. There was no means of separating him from the party, and they said the whole ought to be abandoned on his account, as he had lost an arm, and therefore was not a fit sacrifice to Bhowanee. I replied that he was not deformed, that if he had lost an arm, he had had one once, and the losing of it was not the work of Alla but of man, and that when he died he would appear in the form in which he had been created; therefore he was not forbidden, but was true bunij; and I asked them how they would show their faces to you and to their brethren at the rendezvous with no deed to boast of, and, more than all, no plunder. I prevailed; the whole were strangled; the Jemadar by my own hand, for no one else would touch him, despite of all I said to convince them there was no harm in it. The worst of all was, however, that there were two young girls of a marriageable age, the daughters of the Jemadar. Two of my men took a fancy to them, and would fain have carried them off to be their wives, but they would

not consent, and they were strangled with the rest."

We were now somewhat at a loss for a route, or whither to go. The omens were consulted at Saugor, which was our place of rendezvous; and as they pointed to the northward, we struck off the high-road to the north at Saugor, and took that to Seronje. But my father returned to Jhalone. We divided into two bodies, each a day's march from the other, for we were fearful of being suspected if we travelled in large numbers; and since the Europeans had got a footing in the country, we found that we were asked more questions at the different posts and guards than we had used to be. Besides, large bodies of travellers had disappeared in various directions by the hands of other bands of Thugs, and the authorities were suspicious and inquisitive to a degree. However, now with bullying, now with bribes, we contrived to pass on, leaving our fruit as we went in many a sly place, which the Choukedars never suspected; and although we got no large booty, yet scarcely a day passed but one, two, or more travellers met their death at our hands. It was at the village of Ekléra, in Holkar's dominions, (alas! I shall never forget it,) that our

Sothas brought us word they had secured a small party of travellers, who they had heard were about to proceed to a village a few coss distant.

Of course our men told them of the danger of travelling alone, of the alarms there were of Thugs, and begged of them to accompany our large party for safety, which had collected for the same purpose, and they consented. The Sothas offered to introduce them to me as the leader of the Kafila; and accordingly, at sunset, one of them returned to the bazar, and brought two of the men to me. I received them cordially, repeated the same stories as my men had done, and frightened them quite sufficiently for my purpose.

“Listen,” said one; “though I have never seen a Thug, nor know of any existing in this part, yet that they have been here there is no doubt. My wife’s father was killed by them.”

“How!” said I; “it is horrible to think on; how did this happen? know you aught of the particulars?”

“No,” replied he, “none but what I have heard from others. I was a boy at the time, but the old men of the village know them well, and often speak of them even to this day. I will introduce

you to my father-in-law, as I justly call him, and he shall tell you the tale himself. Mashalla! he tells it with much spirit, and 't is worth hearing."

I confess I was interested; why I should have been so at a common tale of Thuggee was more than I can imagine. I rose and followed the man to his house, determined to hear the whole story from his father-in-law's mouth.

I have said it was yet day; the sun was setting, and the village was a scene of bustle and noise, as is always the case in an evening; the herds which had been out to graze were pouring in at the gates, raising clouds of dust, through which the walls were but dimly seen. Yet still as I advanced I fancied them familiar to me; I imagined I knew the names of different places near them,—one in particular, the abode of a Fakeer, around which was a small garden. I almost started when I approached it, for it seemed like the face of a familiar friend one meets after a long, long absence, when one hesitates to accost him by name, though almost assured of his identity. But in spite of my desire to know the name of the garden I walked on, for it would not have

suiting my purpose to have appeared to recognise any object, having represented myself to be an utter stranger. As we passed through the gate, objects more and more familiar to my eyes presented themselves,—the bazar, the little Mosque, the Kotwal's Chowree, the temple of Mahadeo. I could have named them all, and one house in particular,—my heart leaped within me as I passed it. There was nothing remarkable in it; but it seemed unaccountably fresh to me,—as though I had but left it yesterday.

Still I walked on silently, and my companion did not notice the agitation and surprise which must have been depicted on my features. We reached the house, a respectable one in appearance; and desiring me to be seated, he left me, to bring the old man of whom he had spoken. When he entered, Alla! Alla! I could have called him too by name, though his features were shrunken and withered. I was almost about to exclaim, Rheim Khan! but I checked myself, and as he was presented to me under another name, Futih Mahomed Khan. I was silent.

The whole, after this, thought I, must be a wild dream, or I may have visited the place in

my wanderings, perhaps staid a few days at it, and it is thus familiar to me. After some desultory conversation my new friend stated what he had told me, and requested his father-in-law to relate the story of Peer Khan, with all its particulars.

CHAPTER XI.

“Now o’er one half the world
 Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
 The curtained sleep. . . . Now withered murder
 thus with his stealthy pace,
 Towards his design moves like a ghost.”

MACBETH, act ii. sc. 2.

THE old man returned my salutations cordially; and when we were fairly seated, and the hookah had passed round, he related the sad history of the parents of the girl he had adopted. His version of the tale differed little from that of my new acquaintance; and indeed the whole affair appeared to have been as successful a piece of Thuggee as I had ever listened to. I wonder who they were, thought I; I will mention the story to my father; perhaps he may have heard of it, and can give me some clue to the boy whose

fate is buried in uncertainty. Yet the lad may even now be among us; and as this thought flashed across my mind, a half conviction forced itself upon me that I was the man! But I checked it,—it was a foolish thought, such as one harbours sometimes upon the slightest cause, and dismisses after a moment's reflection.

“And you never heard aught of them afterwards, nor of the boy?” I asked.

“Never,” said the old man; “never; years have passed since then, and the lad, if he lives, is about your own age, Meer Sahib; and—Ya Alla!” cried he, gazing on me, as a gust of wind caused the lamp to flare towards me, “those features are familiar to me!—speak, man! thou art not the son of him who was murdered?”

I confess that his earnest gaze and manner, with my previous convictions that the village was familiar to me, almost overpowered me; but I was too old an adept in deceit to be long staggered by a suspicion which he had no means of confirming, and I replied carelessly and with a laugh: “No, no, that cannot be; my father still lives, though my mother is dead; indeed I have but little remembrance of her. Besides we are pure Syuds by descent, and reside in a

distant country, and you spoke of your old friend as a Pathan."

"It cannot be, then," said the old man, turning away with an air of disappointment; "yet the resemblance is very striking, and I pray you, Meer Sahib, to pardon an old man's mistake; it may be that my eyes are failing me. Yet look at him, my son, and say, does he not resemble *her*?"

"He does so certainly," replied the other, "and I was struck with the similarity of features when I first saw him; but it must be imaginary, or it is perhaps one of those unaccountable resemblances which one often sees without being able to discover any cause why it should exist."

"But you spoke of a coin," said I, "which you hold to be possessed of peculiar virtues."

"I did, Meer Sahib, and my father will tell you that I have not overrated its efficacy."

"Nor has he," said the other; "many charms have I seen, but none equal to it: when around the neck of the wearer, no evil comes to her, no disease attacks her, and the eye of the malevolent or envious rests in vain upon her. Assuredly it possesses wonderful

virtues, for if it is ever absent from her, she suffers from disease, or is unquiet in mind."

"Alla ke Qoodrut!" I exclaimed; "it is the work of God. Such charms are indeed precious, and lucky is the possessor of them. I had once a son,—he became the victim of an evil glance, cast by a Fakeer to whom alms were denied; he cursed my house, and the boy pined and died. I was absent from my home, and you may judge, sirs, of my agony when I arrived and learned my boy was dead. I have never been blessed with another; but a girl still survives, upon whom every care is lavished, and no charm is offered for sale by the wandering Fakeers, Moslem or Hindoo, but it is eagerly purchased, and hung around her neck. In this manner I have spent much money, but as yet without effect; for my child is delicate, and afflicted with dreams which disturb her rest and disquiet her gentle spirit; and I would to Alla I could become the possessor of some charm similar to the one you mention."

"Keep a stout heart, Meer Sahib," said the old man; "you have bought your experience with sorrow, to be sure, yet a constant attention to the wants of the holy wanderers will no doubt have its effect in the end, and their prayers

will be offered for the health of your child and her long life.”

“May Alla listen to them !” said I fervently, for my heart was then with my child and my loved wife.

I arose to take my leave, and as my new friend insisted on accompanying me to our camp, we walked thither.

“You will be ready, then, at the first dawn,” observed I ; “we travel early for the sake of the cool morning air, and my companions bestir themselves as soon as the first blush of light spreads over the east.”

“Depend on me,” said he, “I will not keep you waiting: we have a long stage before us.”

He left me. I will have the charm, thought I, as I lay down to rest; my child shall be protected by its extraordinary virtue, and there will be an end of the constant searchings for amulets, which do no good, and cost much money: besides, I could not bring Azima a gift she would prize more highly, better far in her eyes than strings of pearls or costly jewels. Thus musing, my thoughts wandered to my home: my treasures were before me in imagination, and I compared this my wild and exciting life with the peaceful moments I enjoyed when

I was there with them—Azima lying beside me, and our child amusing us with her innocent gambols. The contrast was forcible, and appealed to my best feelings.

I fell asleep; nor did I awake until the bustle of preparation for the journey warned me that it was time to rise. Having performed my ablutions, I repeated the morning prayer and thanksgiving, and issuing from my little tent, I saw the band was in readiness to move on; but my new acquaintance and his family were as yet not with us.

“Shall we move on?” asked Laloo,—who was now my confidant, being the second of the Bhuttotes,—as I stood near my horse, preparing to mount.

“Not yet,” said I; “I expect some bunij from the village; they promised not to be late, yet the day advances. Send some one to hurry them.”

“Ay, our friends of last night, I suppose, Meer Sahib. Of course we will wait for them, and I will send a fellow to quicken them: know you how many there will be to deal with?”

“Not I,” I replied; “there are a man and his wife, but how many more I know not. We shall soon see, however.”

Our messenger returned almost immediately. "They come," said he; "I had not reached the village gate when I saw them issue forth."

"And how many are there?" I asked.

"There are two women on ponies, one old one on foot, and three men armed with sword and matchlock."

"Six in all," said I; "do you Laloo tell off the Bhuttotes: if we find a good place today I will give the jhirnee; if not, the business can be done tomorrow."

"True, Meer Sahib," he replied; "but we had better put it off today. To tell you the truth, there was an objectionable omen this morning, and you know there is no need of risking anything."

"Certainly not; we can send on the Belhas tonight, and things are best done which are conducted regularly."

The village party now approached us, and salutations were exchanged; we stayed not, but pushed on at as rapid a pace as allowed the villagers to keep up with us; and we travelled thus to the end of the stage. I saw no likely place for the deed on our way, for the country was thickly peopled and the villages were close to each other. But I heard with in-

ward satisfaction from my acquaintance, that the next march was through a lonely tract, and I was urged by him to be on the alert and careful, for that robbers were plentiful, and we might be attacked.

They rested in our camp that day and night. I watched eagerly to see, if it were possible, the face of the woman who bore the prize I so eagerly coveted, but I could not discern it; she was strictly secluded, or if she moved out of the temporary screen her husband had erected, she was enveloped in a thick wrapper, which defied my utmost attempts to discover her countenance. But she was *mine*, and I gloried in the thought that ere another day should pass over me, she would have fallen under my hand, and the charm would be mine also. You, Sahib, will perhaps wonder at my eagerness to possess it; but you know us not, if you do. What mother is there in Hindostan, ay, or father, who does not covet a potent charm against the evil eye for his child or for his wife, far more than riches, nay the commonest necessaries or comforts of life? A child falls sick, the glance of some one is declared to have rested on it, ceremonies are performed without number, pepper is burned, mustard-seed placed in the

room, and other things done which you would laugh at were I to relate them all; and hence comes the necessity of charms. Holy men are besought to give them, and are paid for them highly: Fakeers are implored to pronounce mystic words over the suffering infant; and women will sell anything they possess, even their jewels, to purchase an amulet which is said to be efficacious. Sahib, I had lost one child; another, my sole offspring, was constantly ailing, and we were tormented by a thousand miserable anticipations regarding her. Within my reach was a sovereign remedy for all, so at least I firmly believed. Can you wonder at my eagerness, my impatience to possess it?

Laloo came to me, and with him the chief of the Belhas. "We are to go on, I suppose, as soon as we can?" said the latter.

"Certainly," replied I; "I hear the road lies through a lonely tract, which commences a few coss from here. See that you choose a good place, and that the grave will hold six bodies."

"Jo hookum!" rejoined the fellow; "but I hope the information is correct about the road, and that it is not like the last stage, cultivated ground from first to last. I would have defied the best Belha that ever drew breath to have

selected a spot free from a chance of interruption."

"Rest content," said I; "the information is good, I had it from our fellow-travellers, who have passed that way a hundred times."

"Then I will start by sunset," continued he; "I suppose the nearer to this the place is selected, consistently with security, the better."

"Certainly," said I. "Go; you have your leave."

Midnight soon arrived: we had arisen and had proceeded about three coss on our way; we had passed every village, and entered on the desolate tract I have mentioned. The hot night wind still sighed over the waste, and through the thorny bushes by which it was thinly covered. No sound broke the silence, save a shrill neigh from one of our baggage ponies at intervals, or the wild and melancholy note of the plover as it piped its song to its mate, and was answered again from afar. Once or twice the half shriek, half howl of a hyæna might be heard, and so like was the cry to that of a wretch under the knife of an assassin, that my blood curdled in my veins as the sound thrilled through me. I rode on, first of the party, eagerly looking for the Belha, who should

give me the welcome intelligence that the grave was ready, and that we were secure from interruption; nor had I long to wait for this. At a turning in the road I saw the trusty messenger seated; and as he espied me and arose, I hastened to meet him.

“Bhil manjeh?” I asked in our slang language.

“Manjeh,” was the reply: “’t is ready, Meer Sahib.”

“And how far, Gopal?”

“Scarcely a cannon-shot from hence, a dry nulla with a sandy bed crosses the road; and a tributary streamlet’s course, between high and narrow banks, was the best place we could find.”

“Good,” said I, “you are always careful; now keep near me, and hold my horse when I dismount: I have a share in this affair which I would not trust to another.”

I slackened my horse’s pace, and the party soon overtook me. I stopped as they came up, and dismounted.

“A plague on these roads of yours, Khan,” said I to my acquaintance; “my horse has lost a shoe, and his foot is somewhat tender; so I will walk a coss or two to ease him of my

weight. Surely there cannot be much more of this stony track."

"Not much; a coss or two perhaps; we ought to be near a dry nulla, if I am not mistaken, and from thence the next village is a coss and a half; after that the road is good."

"Let the Meer Sahib ride on my tattoo," said a voice like music; "I am cramped and stiff, and I shall be glad to walk awhile."

It was that of my victim! she who was to die under my hand ere a quarter of an hour elapsed. She must be beautiful with that voice, thought I; but I shall see.

"No, no, Khan," said I, "that must not be; I am soldier enough to walk when I have no horse. Mashalla! my limbs are strong and supple, and I would not mind trying you at a long stage."

"As you will, Meer Sahib, but you have only to say the word, and she dismounts. Alla knows 't is a small recompense for your safe protection over this dreary tract, which never man yet passed but with fear and apprehension. The nulla too, we shall reach it soon;—they say many a brave fellow's blood has moistened its sand."

I saw the woman shudder at her husband's speech, and I checked him.

“Shame on you, Khan!” said I; “think who hears you: women's ears are not fitted to listen to tales of blood, save when they are of a battle-field, and of scenes in which honour is gained and fame won at the sword's point. Here you are safe; no rascally Dacoo would dare to meddle with a kafila like ours, and we shall pass the nulla, as we have those behind us, without a thought of its dangers or what has ever happened in it. But what was that?” I eagerly asked, as something crossed our path close to my feet.

“Nothing, but a hare,” said the Khan; “some prowling jackal has scared her from her form, and she seeks another hiding-place.”

“A hare!” I repeated, the current of my blood seeming to be suddenly arrested, as I thought on the fearful omen to a Thug,—one that could not be disregarded, or, if disregarded, was certain to be followed by the most dire calamities, nothing less than death or long imprisonment.

“Yes, Meer Sahib, a hare. Why should it astonish you?”

“But across my very path,” I muttered involuntarily.

“’T was chance,” said the man; “what of it?”

“Nothing,” replied I; “nothing,—we have an old superstition about it in my country, but ’t is an old woman’s tale, I dare say.”

I paced on in silence. Ya Alla! what a conflict was raging in my heart! I have told you I disregarded omens: I cared not for them, only as they were the soul of Thuggee as far as my men were concerned; and to humour them I feigned to be particular in their observance. But my soul quailed when I was put to the proof. Every tale I had heard of the vengeance of Bhowanee at a conscious neglect of her commands and omens flashed in rapid succession across my mind,—how one had died, eaten by worms; another been overtaken by what the world called justice; how another had lost his wife or children,—and I too had yet a child! I say I quailed in mental terror for awhile; but mine was a stout heart, a noble spirit; and it roused at my call, like that of a good steed, which worn and weary with travel, yet at the approach of strife or danger bears his master as gallantly as though he were

fresh from his stall. Yes, my soul rallied. Away with such idle tales, fit only to be bug-bears to children, said I mentally; Ameer Ali is not to be frightened by them. And to lose the charm,—the object of my anxiety, when almost within my grasp! I laughed aloud.

“You are merry, Meer Sahib,” cried Laloo, who I saw was at his place; “tell us your thoughts, that we may laugh too; and by Alla! we need it, for a more unsainted country I never saw.”

“’T was but a thought,” said I. “Know you where my hookah is?”

“I do not,” he replied, “but I will call for it.” And the word was passed by those who followed us for it to be brought.

This was the preparatory signal. Every one heard it and took his post. The place could not be far, and with my last words had passed away every chance of life to our companions.

Nor was it far off; a few moments’ walking brought us to the brink of the nulla. I first descended into it, and disengaged my roomal. I was ready; one by one the others followed me, and we were now in the middle of the dry and sandy bed, mingled together, the victims

and their destroyers. I saw the time was come, and I gave the jhirnee.

They fell,—ay all! and almost at the same time. There was no sound, no cry; all that I heard was a faint gurgling noise from the husband of the woman, who had writhed in her death-agony under my fatal gripe; a few convulsive throes and she was dead! I tore away the boddice which covered her bosom; I thrust my hands into it, and groped upon the still warm breast for the prize I had so earnestly longed for. I found it tied to a silk cord,—which defied my utmost efforts to break; but I unsheathed my dagger and cut it, and I hugged the treasure to my heart in a frenzy of exultation. One look at the face, thought I, and the Lughaees may do their work; and I gazed on it. It was beautiful, very beautiful; but the expression and the eyes—, Sahib! why did I look at it? I might have spared myself years of torment had I not done so. That face, of all that I have ever seen in death, haunts me still, and will ever haunt me, sleeping or waking.

Not that it had any particular effect on me then. No, it was afterwards, as you shall hear, and when I had discovered what I had done. Yes, she was beautiful, fair as my own

Azima, as delicate and faultless in form. The Lughaees shall not behold these beauties, thought I, nor could I listen to their coarse remarks; so I covered up the bosom, folded the body decently in the sheet which had been around her, and sat down by it to await their coming.

“How, Jemadar Sahib!” said Gopal, as he came up to me, “have you not stripped the body? But let me do so; yonder sheet is worth two rupees.”

“Let it alone!” cried I; “touch her not; she is too fair for the like of you to look on. And hark ye, my friend, let her be buried as you see her now. Whatever the others may say, tell them that it is my order; and for your own share, you shall have a new sheet when we reach Jhalone.”

“Jo hookum,” said the man, “you shall be obeyed. But have you searched for jewels?”

“I have; she had none. Away with her, and see that I am obeyed. Yet stay, I will accompany you.”

I went with him. The grave was where they had described it, between the high and narrow banks of a small watercourse; it was deep, and already contained some bodies. I saw that of the

fair girl laid carefully down over them, and I prevented their mutilating it with their knives as they had done the others. I waited till all had been finished, and the grave covered in ; and collecting my scattered party we pursued our journey. It was well we had been so expeditious, for scarcely half a coss from the spot we met a large party of travellers, who, confident in their numbers, had pushed on by night as we had done. Short greetings were exchanged between us, a few inquiries as to the road, whether water was to be had, and where, and we passed on.

Our booty was small enough, as you may conceive : about forty rupees, a few changes of raiment, the tattoo of the deceased, and the few and simple ornaments of the women, worth perhaps a hundred rupees, were all we got. But I had the real prize, worth in my eyes thousands of rupees. No one knew I had it, and I kept it hung round my own neck, and close to my heart. A thousand times I took it out and gazed at it ; there was something about it which had a mysterious effect on me : many times I thought I had seen it before, and I fancied its old and battered surface was familiar to me. But my mind gave me no clue to the idea, and I attributed the effect I have described to the in-

fluence of the charm itself, and I was assured of its potency. How Azima will prize it! thought I;—in itself valueless, yet a treasure in her eyes and mine, for it will protect our child, and many an envious eye is upon her.

We were still far from Jhalone, and the season admitted of further wanderings; but I was sated. Strange to say, I no longer thirsted for adventure; and though it came, and men were delivered into our hands, yet I sought not for them. Those we destroyed were casual travellers who joined our party, and whose destruction was unavoidable.

We held a general deliberation at a village on the confines of Malwa; and though some were for travelling northward as far as Agra, and thence to Jhalone, I overruled this, and indeed had the majority on my side, who were satisfied with what we had got, and longed for their homes as I did. "However, my friends," said I, "our proceeding homewards need not bring us worse booty than we should get by going north. Roads are roads, and travellers will surely be on them wherever we go. Let us not relax in our vigilance, and do you trust in the lucky fortune of Ameer Ali. Victory has always followed him, and his star is

still high in the ascendant. Above all, let us consult the omens, and by them be guided; if it is our fate soon to see our homes, they will determine our actions and proceedings."

My speech was received with plaudits; the omens were consulted; and though none remarkable were observed, yet in the opinion of the best-informed Thugs we were justified in holding our present direction, till it should be changed either by meeting with new adventures or adverse omens. Accordingly we pursued our route.

I forget how many days it was afterwards, but we were encamped at Tearee, a large town in Bundelkhund, and had been there two days in the hope of bunij. We had been unlucky in not meeting with any till then; but our Tilhaees were actively employed, and I was determined not to quit the town without an adventure, as it was the last place on the road to Jhalone where we could hope to meet with any of consequence. The Sothas and Tilhaees, however, returned in the afternoon with downcast faces, declaring they could meet with no one, except miserable creatures hardly worth the trouble of destroying; and all were for moving off the next morning.

I was piqued at our ill luck, I know not why. "Stay, however," said I to them all, "for the morrow; something tells me it will be a lucky day, and one is not of much consequence." My will was of course law to them, and early the next day, I dressed myself in my best clothes, armed myself with my most showy weapons, and taking some of the Thugs with me, as it were a personal escort, I rode into the town, causing my horse to caracole as I went, in order to show off my admirable horsemanship. Twice did I ride up and down the bazar and the principal streets, but without meeting with any hope of adventure or bunij. At last, observing three respectable-looking Mahomedans seated on a chubootra, or terrace, under the shade of a large peepul-tree, I rode up to them, and inquired whether they could direct me to the abode of any dealer in pearls or precious stones, as I wished to purchase some.

"Are you in earnest?" said the oldest of the three, "or do you merely ask to find out whether our poor town would afford you such precious commodities?"

"God forbid, sirs," said I, "that one so young as I am, should dare to endeavour to jest with men of your age and respectable ap-

pearance. I do indeed seek what I have said, and shall rejoice if any of you can direct my steps, for here I am a stranger."

"Since such is the case," replied the old gentleman, "I am happy in being able even at this moment to present you to Shekh Nusr-ooden, who sits here beside me, and who follows the respectable calling you are in search of. But you had better dismount, and, if such is your pleasure, join our Mujlis for as long as you feel inclined. My worthy friend will then, I doubt not, be happy to accompany you to his abode, and show you the articles you require."

"You are kind," said I, "and I accept of your civil invitation." So saying I dismounted, and ascended by a few steps to where they were sitting.

A few moments were occupied in the ceremonies of being seated. My new acquaintance called for a hookah and sherbet, and in a few moments we were on excellent terms.

"And what may be your distinguished name?" said the elder of the three, who had first accosted me.

I named myself:—"a poor Syud," said I; "an unworthy descendant of our Prophet,—on whose name be peace!"

“Mashalla! I told you so,” cried the old man. “Mashalla! there is no mistaking the noble race;—and his speech too! How say ye, my friends, is it not sweet and mellifluous like a verse of Hafiz?”

“Ameen! Ameen!” cried both, “’t is even so; the young Syud is a worthy representative of his tribe, and we are fortunate in having made his acquaintance.”

“You overpower me, worthy sirs,” said I; “I little merit these encomiums; for having spent all my days in camps and in strife, I have learned few of those courtesies which ought to adorn the manners of every true believer.”

“You have served then with Sindia?” asked the pearl-merchant.

“No,” said I, “not in his armies, though there has been tough fighting enough to be seen with them. I have served in the Dukhun; and I am proud to say under the banners of Salabut Khan of Ellichpoor.”

“A good name,” cried all; “the noble Khan too has won it bravely, though not on our side in the late contests.”

“It matters not,” said I; “wherever a blow was to be struck, or there was hope of a fight

or a foray, Salabut Khan was ever first in the fray, and the last to leave it."

"And your destination, Syud?" asked the pearl-merchant.

"Jhalone," I replied. "Salabut Khan has reduced his force; and there being no longer hope of employment for a cavalier like myself, I returned home to my father, and have taken quiet service with the Rajah,—whom Alla preserve! for he is as generous a prince as any of Hindostan; and on his behalf I have recently been on a mission to the durbar of Doulut Rao, on some matters which have been in dispute between them. I am proud too to say that all has been quietly settled."

"Soobhan Alla!" cried the third worthy; "how could it be otherwise, since our honoured guest has managed the negotiation?"

Again I bowed my head to the earth, and acknowledged the compliment. Some desultory conversation followed, and I rose to depart.

"My time is precious," said I, "and I implore you to excuse me. I have much to arrange about the men who accompany me, and I go on to the chowree to settle their accounts with the kotwal: if the worthy Shekh will allow one of his attendants to point out his

abode, I will notice it, and visit him ere sunset."

"Nay, Meer Sahib, this cannot be," replied the Shekh: "behold I am ready, I will accompany you; my poor house is not far off, and Alla forbid I should be the means of trespassing upon your time."

He arose, girded up his loins, threw his shawl over his shoulders, and thrusting his feet into his slippers prepared to accompany me.

"I take my leave then, worthy sirs," said I to the others; "may health be with you!"

"Not without the pān and utr, Meer Sahib," said the elder; "it cannot be, that we should let you go like a dog." And calling to an attendant, the articles were brought. The pān was presented to me; I was duly anointed on my beard and under my arms, and after a few more salams and compliments, I was following my new acquaintance the pearl-merchant.

"Is he to be bunij?" whispered one of my attendant Thugs to me in Ramasee as I passed him.

"Hush!" said I, "speak not a word; but run all of ye before us and clear the way, as if I were a great man."

They obeyed me, and ran forward, shouting and pushing the crowd to and fro, as though I had been a nobleman of fifty descents and a hundred titles.

We soon reached the house of the merchant ; and leaving our slippers at the door, he took me by the hand and led me at once into the private apartment, where I suppose he transacted his business or received his best customers. It was a dahlan, or veranda, opening into a court, in the centre of which was a small fountain ; its edges were planted with red poppies and larkspur, in various figures ; and a plantain tree or two flung their broad green leaves over all. The place looked cool, and was scrupulously neat and clean. The room where we sat had been newly whitewashed, and its floor covered with a white cloth, except the musnud itself, which was of yellow cloth, bordered with blue velvet ; a few large luxurious-looking pillows invited me to recline, and forget the world and its cares. Such shall be my own home, thought I, after awhile ; a fountain is easily made, and I will enjoy my peace and quiet even as this worthy does. I had seen a hundred such, but the unobtrusive

neatness and comfort of the spot struck me forcibly; and whilst envying the possessor his peaceful lot, I was inwardly forming a plan to decoy him with me, which I had leisure to mature, for he had left me seated, and was for some time absent.

CHAPTER XII.

Hor.—What is the issue of the business there?

Ham.—It will be short, the interim is mine :

And a man's life's no more than to say one."

HAMLET, act v. sc. 2.

HE returned after some time, bringing with him a small casket, and leading by the hand a noble-looking boy, whom he presented to me as his son, his first-born. He was about twelve years of age, intelligent in feature, and withal handsome, and possessing a confidence of manner I had never seen surpassed.

"Alla has been merciful to you, my friend," said I; "and the Sahib Zadah is worthy of his sire. I had a son too once, who promised to be such a one as the boy before me; but it was

His will! and I have now a lonely house. Yet why obtrude my griefs upon a stranger? You have doubtless other flowers of the same tree."

"There are three of them," said the merchant, "and they are the pride of my existence; for, after all, what is wealth? what is honour? what is well-doing or respect in the world, without some one to inherit it, and to tell of his father to yet unborn generations? And you are yet young. Why be without hope? Alla will not fail to listen to the prayers of a devout Syud."

"Alas," said I, "I think not of it. A girl remains to me, who is contracted in marriage to the son of a worthy neighbour, and upon her rest my hopes at present. It is on her account that I seek a few pearls for the marriage ceremonies."

"And they are here, Meer Sahib; pearls from Surat and from Serendeeb,—jewels that a monarch might be proud to wear." And he opened the casket, and displayed its beautiful contents to my admiring eyes.

"They are indeed beautiful," said I; "but a poor soldier like myself has little to do with such costly ornaments. Show me, I pray you, a few of a lower price, such as will suit

my present wants, which do not reach further than three hundred rupees' worth."

He selected a string, and held them out to me; they were what I really required, and the purchase was quickly concluded.

Still however the glittering strings lay before me; and as I took up one in particular of great beauty, from the evenness of the pearls and their bright water, I said, as if involuntarily, "Would that my patron could see these!"

"Eh! what?" cried the merchant. "Do you think he would purchase them?"

"Assuredly," said I; "for shortly before I left Jhalone the Rajah was in the greatest need of pearls, and sent hither and thither for them, but without success; none were to be procured; and he was even talking of sending to Surat for some; but the length of the journey, and the risk, put the matter out of his head."

The merchant mused for awhile. At last he said, "And you really think he would purchase them?"

"I do. His daughter will be married next year, and he is collecting jewels for the ceremony."

"They are very beautiful," said the merchant, taking up the string, "are they not?"

I have had them now for two years, and no one here is rich enough to purchase them; yet they are cheap, I swear by your beard they are, and I look for but little profit upon them."

"The price?" I asked.

"From a poor man, like you, Meer Sahib, a Syud and a soldier, I would take six thousand rupees, but from a Rajah and an infidel I would ask eight."

"Good," said I. "Now listen to me. I am, as you say, poor; and I have the heavy expense of this marriage coming upon me. What say you to accepting my aid, and taking the pearls to Jhalone and selling them there? The Rajah is much guided by me; and if I get him to pay eight thousand rupees, you will pay me back the three hundred I now owe you for those I have purchased? Turn it over in your mind, and tell me your determination."

"Jhalone is a long way," said the merchant: "and if I sell my pearls, how am I to get back with the money? Thieves will hear of the transaction, and I may be waylaid and murdered."

"Fear not," replied I, "be at rest on that score. To one who has come so far from his home to oblige him, the Rajah will give an escort to re-

turn. Of this I am confident ; and if this is all that prevents your making the determination to accompany me, you had better dismiss it from your mind at once."

" I will consult the astrologer," said he.

" Nay, Shekhjee," I replied, " this is too ridiculous. What have we true believers to do with astrologers? The man you would consult is a Hindoo, and there is abomination in the very word. Besides, what danger is there? I have some fifty men with me, my own attendants, and the Rajah's sepoy, therefore no harm can come to you ; as for your return you will have a few horsemen, who will afford you ample protection. Again, you said you have had the necklace for two years, and never had an offer for it; why, therefore, keep your money unemployed? Be wise, man, and come with me."

" Yes, father," said the lad, " listen to what the brave Meer Sahib says ; and I will accompany you, and see the world beyond our town. You know you have promised to take me with you the first journey you make."

" Well, it is very tempting certainly," said the merchant. " Eight thousand rupees, you said, Meer Sahib? That is worth going for,

and these baubles are useless to me here. To tell you the truth," continued he, "I got them from a Pindharee, who served with Cheetoo, or Dost Mahomed, I know not which; he kept them as long as he could, but the Lubhurs were broken up by the Feringhees (a sad blow to our free trade), and though a few horsemen, his own followers, stuck to him, yet he had nothing to give them; at last, when they became mutinous, and threatened his life for their pay, he was obliged to sell these, and I was the purchaser."

"And you got them cheap?" said I.

"Yes, they were not dear, Meer Sahib; a man in necessity rarely drives a hard bargain. I got them cheap; and yet I swear to you that they are cheap at eight thousand rupees. I say this from experience; for I have sold worse to Mahdajee Sindia himself for ten thousand; but he will not purchase now, and they lie heavy on my hands."

"All therefore considered, Shekhjee," said I, "you had by far better accompany me to Jhalone. As to the journey, a month will see you back again; the season is favourable for travel, and as we are a strong party, and march by night, you will never be incommoded by the sun."

“Well, Meer Sahib, I have almost determined; but it will be necessary to tell those inside,” and he pointed with his thumb to the zenana; “and as you said you had to go to the kotwal on some business, if you could look in here after it is all over, about the time of evening prayer, I shall be able to give you a decisive answer. Much as we affect to despise women, you know, I dare say, Meer Sahib, that it makes one uncomfortable to undertake anything, more especially a journey, without consulting them.”

“As you will,” said I; “I am indifferent about the matter; it is for your good alone that I have offered this counsel; and in this world of infidelity and selfishness it is refreshing to the heart either to assist a brother Moslem, or to be assisted by one without selfish motives. Alla Hafiz! I take my leave, and I will return by the Moghreb, and bring the money for my pearls.” I left him.

“Is he to be bunij?” again asked the Thug.

“Peace, fool!” said I, laughing; “he has gorged the bait, but the hook is not yet struck. Wait. Inshalla! Ameer Ali is not the son of an owl or a jackass; and Inshalla! we will yet

throw dirt on his beard, for all he is so cautious.”

I had no business with the kotwal, as you may have imagined. I rode to my tent, and assembling the leaders of the band, developed to them my plans, and gave them instructions as to their demeanor and conduct before our new guest in prospect: this done, I was easy about the rest. If he came!—It was almost too much to hope for; yet I had confidence in myself and in my fate. And the boy! that beautiful boy!—I had (for once) no heart to be a participator in his death. I must not allow him to accompany us, I said to myself; enough that the house is made desolate by the death of the father. I was thus musing when Laloo came to me.

“You are mad, Meer Sahib,” said he; “this plan is not feasible. Bunij met with on the road is well enough; but to drag a man out of his house, as I may say, to destroy him, is too bad; and I do not think it is justifiable.”

“Ha!” cried I; “so you are turned against me. How is this?”

“God forbid that you should say so, Meer Sahib; but look at the matter. You are known

in the town, people have seen you enter the house of the merchant, and they will know that he accompanies you. Will they not hunt us out?"

"You are an owl," said I, laughing; "trust me, there is no fear; and as for taking the man out of his house, I tell thee I see no more difference in it than in having met him on the road in the regular way. Let me alone, I know my work, and when we have got him you shall yourself applaud what I have done."

"Nay, it was but a friendly remonstrance," said he; "and as you feel confident, go on with the matter. He will be good bunij?"

"Assuredly, to the tune of some thousand rupees. By Alla! I was tired of the humdrum work we have been at lately, and my blood stagnated in my veins. This has stirred it, and I have set myself to the work. You know I seldom fail."

"Seldom indeed, Meer Sahib; but can I do aught?"

"Yes, you can," said I: "follow me at a little distance, and note the house. The fool I am after will depend on his astrologer for a good day to quit his home. I am sure of this, for he said he would; and he took my bantering

against it with an ill grace. Find out his servants, and from them the Brahmin; take money with you and pay him. There is enough of daylight yet, and remember tomorrow morning is to be a lucky one, and the next a bad one. Mind this, and do your best, for much depends upon it—nay, everything.”

“On my head and eyes be it!” said he; “and therefore, Meer Sahib, I pray you accompany me even now, better in disguise perhaps, and show me the house. Leave the rest to me, and I will not fail.”

“A good thought,” said I. “The sun will not set for the next four hours; I can easily return and equip myself afresh. So saying I stripped myself of my fine clothes, put on others which were soiled and dirty, tied up my face, except my eyes, and tucking my sword under my arm, looked as disreputable a brawler or smoker of ganja as any in the good town of Tearee.”

“Come,” said I, “our errand is soon done;” and so it was. We walked past the house, and I left my ally at the corner of the street, with a hundred rupees in his waistband, and a cunning heart in his breast.

I returned, and re-dressing myself, I mounted

my horse, and took my way to the merchant's, with the money I owed him. I found him in the same spot; but as the evening was sultry, he led me to the terrace of his house, where carpets had been spread for our convenience. I paid my money, and received the pearls, and then entered upon the main object of my visit.

“You will go then, Shekhjee?” said I; “or is your mind against it?”

“Not at all, not at all,” replied he. “It is my wish to go,—my great wish, Meer Sahib; but when I mentioned it in my zenana, though the proposition met with no opposing words or tears, they one and all declared that a lucky day must be fixed, without which it would be clearly of no use my going at all. You know what women are, Meer Sahib; suffice it to say, that I could not overcome their scruples; for the more I argued and persuaded, the more strongly they opposed; and in fact, the matter became so serious, that to pacify them—mind you—to pacify them—I sent ten rupees to a Brahmin who lives hard by, who is a noted astrologer, and the only one here in whom any confidence is placed. Alla is my witness, I cared not what he said; but when a message came back

to say that tomorrow was an unlucky day, the whole Zenan-khana, wives, slaves, and asseels, set up such a howl of lamentation at what might have happened, and afterwards of congratulation at my having escaped the threatened evil, that I was fairly stunned, and have given up the idea of the journey for tomorrow at any rate. But you know, Meer Sahib, tomorrow's conjunction of planets may have a different effect, and as you will stay"—

“Indeed, Shekhjee,” said I, “I cannot stay. Here have I idled away three whole days, and I can remain no longer, for time is precious to me. My patron will even now wonder what has delayed me; and to lose his favour will be the loss of my means of maintenance. So tomorrow I start, most assuredly, whether you come or not. And as to your accompanying me, that is your matter; I am perfectly indifferent to it, except that I shall lose your pleasant society on the road.”

He was fairly perplexed. He had evidently reckoned on my stay; but my careless, yet determined manner of speaking left him no hope of a change in my opinions; and, as a Persian would have said, he held “the finger of deliberation between the teeth of impatient desire.”

There he sat for a long time, looking on the ground in silence. It was a struggle between the love of gain and superstition; for though he had wished me to believe the contrary, he was as fully imbued with the belief of lucky and unlucky days as any of his wives slaves, or asseels. At length he said:

“Meer Sahib, you remember our agreement—the two hundred rupees? I will make it another hundred if you stay one more day. You are a poor man, and a hundred rupees will buy many clothes for your daughter’s marriage.”

Here was a direct attempt to cheat me out of a hundred rupees; and, for the latter part of his speech, I could have strangled him on the spot. Yet I kept my temper: I was playing too deep a game to lose it, and for a trifle too.

“No, Shekh,” said I, “it cannot be; I would not for a thousand rupees stay an hour after daylight tomorrow: you cannot tempt me. But have you ever thought that your Nujoomee may have played you false, and that it requires a few more rupees than ten to make the heavens propitious? I have heard of such things, ay, and proved them too, or perhaps I might believe in the aspect of the stars as you do.”

“Ay! say you so, my friend?” cried he. By Alla I would beat the rogue with a shoe in his own temple, with a shoe of cow’s leather too, if I could think he was trying to cheat me; but that is impossible. How can he help the position of the stars? And yet say, shall I send more money?”

“No,” said I, “surely not; if he is honest, he will fling it in your servant’s face; if he is a rogue, he will keep it, and send word that the stars have changed; in the first case you will eat dirt, in the second you will be cheated, and he will laugh at your beard. No, I see no help for you, but to go in defiance of him, the z-nana, and the stars; and this will prove you to be a man.”

“Impossible, Meer Sahib,” said he despondingly. “Putting the Nujoomee out of the question, I have four wives, Alla help me!—the lawful number you know; but oh! my friend, their wrath is dreadful, and I dare not provoke it.”

“It is enough,” said I; “you will not go, because you dare not,—not because you do not wish it.”

“Exactly, Meer Sahib: you have hit upon the very cause. My own heart is willing, and the prospect of gain leads me; but those women”—

It was prayer time, and the Muezzin's sonorous voice proclaimed the hour from the roof of a neighbouring mosque. We performed our ablutions, and, as good Mussulmans, we spread our carpets, and turning to the still glowing west, poured forth our evening praise and thanksgiving.

I was determined to stay till the last moment I could, to give my emissary time for his proceedings, and, if no message came from the astrologer, to try some other plan, or even to agree to stay another day. Ah, gold! thought I, if thou desertest me now at my best need, I will forswear thy worship.

Our prayers were ended, and still we sat and conversed, but no message came to suit my purpose. I had gradually led the merchant back to the subject of the journey, and was picturing to him, in terms suited to his avaricious soul, the reception he would assuredly meet with at Jhalone; and I was preparing my words to introduce a change in my opinions as to staying another day, when a servant came up the steps, and whispered something in his ear, at which he started, yet at the same time his face put on a joyous appearance.

“Excuse me for an instant, my friend,” said

he; "I am wanted below—some one awaits me in the Dewan Khana. Wait here, and I will rejoin you instantly."

My heart beat loud and quick in my bosom as I watched him down the steps. Could it be that I had succeeded? or was there any fear of danger to my own person? I looked over the terrace; it was far too high to leap from; escape, if there was danger, was impracticable. But a moment's thought rallied me; and as I disengaged my trusty sword, and held it ready for action, I laughed at my own fears, for I knew that I could defend that narrow stair against a host. I looked over into the courtyard of the Dewan Khana, but saw no one: I could hear two loud voices in low and earnest conversation; and as I stretched forth my neck, and bent over the parapet of the terrace, in the vain endeavour to catch a syllable, I was suddenly gratified by seeing the merchant and a figure robed in white, which I knew at once to be that of a Hindoo, while his bare and shaven head proved him to be a priest, emerge from the Dewan Khana; and now their words came clearly to me.

"Then there is no obstacle?" said the merchant.

“None,” said the Brahmin, (for so he was,) “as I have said, there was a mistake in the tables and calculations which I have just discovered. My art also told me that thou wert anxious to go; am I right?”

“Right, ah, virtuous Brahmin, assuredly thou art. I am promised gain—nay, wealth.”

“And thou wilt be successful,” said the other. “May Narayun grant it! I will pray for thy good fortune.”

“Do so, do so, good Brahmin: good Seonath, I will not forget thee on my return. Inshalla! I can be grateful: I will make a nuzzur through thee to the temple.”

“You will not fail to do so, I think Shekhjee, for Ballajee hath been propitious to thee ever since thy nuzzurs have been offered up at his shrine. But I go to present thy gift, though it is a small one. Narayun keep thee!”

“It shall be doubled—trebled, Seonath. I swear to thee by Alla I will not forget when I return. Thou goest! Well, Alla Hafiz, my friend awaits me.”

He returned to me. “Rejoice with me, my friend,” cried he, “my kind Meer Sahib! After all tomorrow is the lucky day. My friend the Brahmin sent one of his disciples

to say there was a mistake in the calculations upon his tablets, and that the aspect of the heavens was favourable to me for an unlimited period. Ah how wise he is, Meer Sahib, and how honest!—you called him a rogue, but see, he might have kept me in suspense for a month, and refused to consult the stars at all until he had been well paid. Well, after all, it is the power of Alla, and doubtless these infidels hold some communion with him, which is denied to those of the true faith.”

“So it would seem, Shekhjee,” said I, humouring him; “it is no doubt wonderful that your friend, for an astrologer, is for once honest. Of course you paid him liberally for his new discovery?”

The merchant winced. “A trifle, Meer Sahib; a few pice to purchase oil for the temple was all he wanted.”

“Oh, rare disinterestedness!” cried I; “truly it is grateful to the heart to see such conduct in this selfish world, where every one appears to strive how he can overreach his neighbour. Of course he has no prospective advantage?”

“None, Meer Sahib, none! How could a true believer have dealings or connexion with an infidel? Do I not take advantage of his

learning for my own convenience, and then laugh at his beard?" And he chuckled.

Liar! said I to myself, as I clenched my hand and ground my teeth, thou shalt answer to Alla for this perjury before thou art many days older. Verily this is a meritorious deed, and therefore hast thou been delivered into my hands. A Hajji too! Oh, shame, shame! Yet then I remembered the Arab verse which saith, "If thy neighbour hath performed the Haj, trust him not; and if he hath done it twice, haste thee to remove thine abode from his vicinity."

"Good, O Hajji," said I, "and you do right. But the night wanes, you had better make preparation for the journey; and let me offer you counsel; bring no one with you but a servant or two; my company is ample for your protection. I have a small pāl which will hold us both; and, above all, bring not your son,—he will but fatigue himself for no good purpose, and be a clog on our rapid movements, for rapid they must be."

"I will follow your advice in all things, Meer Sahib. I shall bring no servants; the man who will drive my spare tattoo can attend me when I require it; and the less show I make,

the less I shall be suspected of carrying money with me."

"Remember then," said I, "you come to my camp by the time the morning-star rises; we shall all be ready for you, and the sun will not be powerful ere we reach our stage."

He promised to be there by the appointed time, and I left him.

I found my trusty emissary waiting for me in my tent. He burst into a loud laugh when he saw me.

"Is he safe?" he asked at length. "Ah, Meer Sahib, I have had great amusement, as no doubt you have also."

"He is, he is fairly caught. The net is around him; one pull and he is a lost man. And you, my faithful friend, you have succeeded so that I marvel at your success."

"Marvel not," he replied; "the task was easier than I thought. But hear my adventures."

"Surely," said I; and I called for a chilum, while he proceeded.

"You remember when you left me?"—I nodded,—“Well, it was a long time ere I could find a servant; and in despair I lay down in the shade of the wall, but kept awake; at last a fellow came out, a Hindoo, as luck would have

it, and I followed him: 'Canst thou direct me to a kulal's shop?' said I; 'I have travelled far, and my throat is dry.' I saw that the fellow himself drank, from the colour of his eyes, and they sparkled at the mention of the kulal's shop. 'There is one close by,' he replied; 'I will show it.' 'Good,' said I, 'thou shalt share my potations.' Well, we entered the shop, and went into the inner room. I called for a bottle of liquor, and paid for it; the place was somewhat dark, and I poured what I took on the ground, but he drank every drop; he finished the bottle as though it had been water, and I sent for more. At last I began by asking him who his master was, and what service he did, and, Mashalla! I heard in a wonderfully short time all about him; and, lastly, that he was going a journey, but had been prevented by an astrologer's having declared the morrow to be an unlucky day. In fine, my friend Sumbhoo (for such was his name) got very drunk, and having told me much of his master's private history, which did not redound to his credit, he fell senseless on the ground, and there I left him; but not before I had ascertained that the astrologer resided at a temple in the next street, and that his name was Seonath."

“I have seen him,” said I; “a tall, fair man, a good-looking priest, and stout enough for a Thug.”

“You saw him! How and where?”

I told him, and we had a hearty laugh as I described the scene in the court-yard, and mimicked the cringing tones of the merchant and the haughty ones of the Brahmin.

“But listen,” said Laloo, “and wonder, as I did. I soon found the temple and the Brahmin, and accosting him, I begged for a charm against the evil eye for my child. He looked at me—ya Alla, how he looked! I quailed under his gaze, and my flesh crept as if I were in an ague fit; for once I was afraid, for I knew not the man, and yet he seemed as if he could read my heart. ‘Follow me,’ said he, ‘I would speak with thee apart from these prying people.’ He spoke kindly, and I followed him, though almost mechanically. He went before me. ‘Leave your shoes,’ said he; ‘this place must not be polluted: it is sacred.’ At last we were alone, in a small court, where there was a shrine of the god. Again he turned on me, and looked into my face. I really knew not what to think; and oh, how glad I was when

he put an end to my suspense by repeating our signal words!"

"Our signal?"

"Yes, Meer Sahib, even so; I was as much astounded as you are, but the mystery was soon solved; he proved to be a priest of our holiest of temples, Bindachul, who had travelled into these parts, and having picked up some astronomical lore at Benares, set up here for an astrologer, and found the trade so profitable that he has not returned to Bindachul. Of course I had no reservation with him; I developed our plan, from which he at first drew back; but I opened my purse, and five ash-ruffees worked such a change in his sentiments, that he listened to my words with complacency, altered the face of the heavens as far as they concerned your friend, and in fine offered there and then to go and say that his calculations were wrong, and that everything boded prosperity to the poor Shekh."

"He has not failed us," said I.

"No," replied Laloo, "I know that; but we have to pay handsomely. He wanted a hundred rupees more, but I represented that we were a large band, and there would not be much to divide, and I obliged him to be con-

tent with a Bhuttote's share, added to whatever a general subscription might amount to when the band should be informed of the part he had played."

"And he is content?"

"You have had the best proof, Meer Sahib; has he not done the errand he promised? And when did a Brahmin of Bindachul ever break his faith? He dare not: Bhowanee would smite him on the spot, or kill him by lingering torments."

"And how," I asked, "are we to convey this share to him, whatever it may turn out to be?"

"Easily enough; we can get a hoondee on this place, and send it to him in a letter, or we can despatch a man with it."

"True, we can," said I; "and so now go; repeat to the men the lesson I taught them, and enjoin them to be circumspect and wary. We have good bunij in prospect, and In-shalla! we will get it too. But I wish I could see the Brahmin who has done us so good a turn in this matter."

"Let him alone," said he; "he told me that, although he wished much to see you, having often heard of your conduct, it was better to avoid suspicion, and that any open inter-

course between him and you would expose him to the inquiries of those with whom he was associated, and had better be avoided. And he is right, Meer Sahib ; it would do no good."

CHAPTER XIII.

“*Cornwall.*—Pinion him like a thief; bring him before us:
Though well we may not pass upon his life
Without the form of justice, yet our power
Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men
May blame, but not control.”

LEAR, Act iii. Sc. 7.

FOUR days passed, and the merchant was still in our company. He was slightly attended, and we could have terminated his existence whenever we pleased; but we were anxious to carry him on as much of the journey as we could, and to baffle any traces of our route, by turning to the right and left, away from the regular tracks, and by footpaths and byways only known to ourselves. Yet we had got far enough, and I knew that the next day's march

would lead us through a jungle, which was one of our favourite bhils, and where I had from the first determined that he should die.

We were on the road early on the fifth morning, and as before (indeed as was my wont) I was riding at the head of my party. It was now daylight, but we were entering the jungle, and I was merry in my heart to think that he was in my power, and that a large and valuable booty would be our prize in the course of a short hour, when I saw an animal move in the bushes on my right hand. Another instant, and a hare again crossed my path! I laughed within myself. Fools that they are, thought I, these brethren of mine! no Jemadar but myself would dare to pursue this track after so dire an omen; himself and his whole band would fly, as though a hundred tigers were in their path, and would leave their bunij to escape, or to follow them, as his destiny might guide him. But I!—I laugh at it: once I have proved that the omen is harmless, and shall it deter me now? Ah, no, no! my game is sure, and within my grasp.

And so it was. Sahib, we had not gone a coss, when I saw the place I had determined on; and there the merchant died and his two

servants. Yes, he died by my own hand. I pulled him off his pony and strangled him; and the servants were cared for by the others, but not before one of them had cut down one of my men; for in my eagerness to possess myself of the prize before me, I had not seen that the servants of the merchant could observe my actions. The poor fellow who had fallen was dreadfully wounded; yet he still breathed. What to do with him I knew not: we could not wait, and to transport him with us was out of the question.

“What shall we do with Anundee?” said I to Laloo; “we are far from our stage, and we cannot, with our large party, say we have fallen among thieves.”

He solved my doubts at once. “Put him out of his pain,” said he; “the man is dying: what matters another thrust? he can be buried with the rest. The men might not like it if they saw it, but all here are engaged, and most of the band have gone on. We can wrap him up in his sheet afterwards.”

I drew my sword and stepped towards the dying wretch; he looked supplicatingly towards me and strove to speak, but my heart was hard.—I was sickened by the deed I had done,

and I prayed Alla to forgive me the blood of the miserable creature.

Wretch ! said I, interrupting Ameer Ali, and you murdered your own companion, your brother to whom you were sworn ?

I did, Sahib, I did ; yet why call it murder ? He would have died in a short time ; I did but rid him of his misery.

It was a foul deed, Ameer Ali ; and one that haunts your memory, I doubt not.

Sometimes, was the careless answer of the Thug ; and I bade him proceed.

We wrapped the body in the sheet which was around its waist, having taken the money from the waistband. Laloo and myself carried it to the grave, now nearly filled to the top.

“ So he is dead ! ” cried the Lughaees ; “ he could not have lived long after that cut : the fellow who gave it would have done for more of us had not some of us seized on him ; but we have laid him quietly,—he will break no more good men’s heads : and as for poor Anundee, he must be buried with the rest, for to burn him is impossible in this lonely place.”

And he *was* buried ; they deepened the centre of the pit, put some heavy stones over him,

and covered him with earth : and I felt a load taken from my heart as he was covered from my sight for ever. Only Laloo knew what I had done, and I knew him to be faithful and silent : nevertheless I often afterwards wished either that another had done the deed, or that I had let him die.

A rare booty we had, Sahib. After we had eaten the Goor at the next village, we hastened on to the end of the stage ; and before we ungirded our loins I opened the caskets and divided the spoil. Not only had the merchant brought the necklace I have mentioned before, but a heap of unstrung pearls ; and on reckoning up their probable value, we estimated the amount at twenty-five thousand rupees. Now therefore we had no inducement to tarry away from our homes ; we needed no fresh adventure to enrich us, and we pushed on to Jhalone. We reached it in safety, and again I clasped Azima to my heart, and rejoiced to see that my child was well, and with a girl's eagerness looking forward to the time when her marriage ceremony was to take place. My father too was well, and had reached Jhalone without any adventure worth recording, so at least he told me. But of Ganesha there was no news, save that he

had diverged to the eastward, and was supposed to have gone in the direction of Benares; and I little cared, except that the revenge for the destruction of the Moonshee's son rankled in my heart and was not forgotten.

Months passed at my home without care and in peace. Alas! now that I think on it, I can only compare the course of that time to the gentle stream of a river, which as it winds among peaceful scenes and between green and flowery banks, ruffled only by the soft winds playing over its bosom, is suddenly arrested, dashed among rocks, and its current changed to turmoil and furious contention with its stony opposers. I saw no mark of my future lot, no warning was given to me; destruction came upon me in one fell swoop, and I was overwhelmed — I and mine! But for that stroke of fortune I had lived till now an honest and gentle life, for I abandoned Thuggee; and the more I experienced of the soothing pleasures of my home, the more I became estranged from my habits of wandering and of plunder and destruction. Nor was the least urgent reason in the meditated change of my life, that I dreaded every day more and more that some unlucky chance would reveal to

Azima the dreadful trade I followed. I could paint to myself the effect it would have on her loving and gentle disposition, and the prostration of every faculty of her existence, under the shock of knowing that I was a murderer; and often, as she lay upon my heart in the dead of night, these thoughts have come so thick on me, that could her soul have held any mysterious communion with mine, she would have recoiled in horror from my embrace and fled from me for ever. And these fancies recurred so frequently and forcibly that sometimes I almost thought them a warning of coming evil, and I had fully determined to remove my abode and my wealth to Delhi after my daughter's marriage, there to reside for the remainder of the days which might be allotted to me.

I have said months passed without incident; I should have mentioned that an English gentleman some time after my arrival came to Jhalone; and in the many conferences he held in secret with the Rajah, we were given to understand that a treaty of some kind or other had been made, and that he had placed himself under the protection of the English Government. I thought not of it: yet even then a system was working silently yet surely which

for a time struck at the power and confederacy of the Thugs,—a blow as severe, nay more so, as being more lasting, than any they had yet experienced.

The Englishman had left Jhalone some time, and his visit was nearly forgotten by us; my daughter's marriage had begun, and everything was rejoicing in my house. About noon one day one of the Rajah's Hurkara's came with a message that he required my presence and my father's in the Durbar on particular business. In vain was it that I excused myself on the plea of the marriage ceremony. The messenger would take no excuse; and at last, seeing no alternative, we girded our loins and accompanied the Hurkara.

We were ushered through the various courts to the Dewan Khana, where the Rajah sat in Durbar, surrounded by his Mutsuddees and soldiers. Leaving our shoes at the entrance, we were as usual advancing towards his Guddee to make the customary salutations, when a sudden rush was made upon us from both sides of the hall, and we were at once seized and disarmed. In vain I struggled with my captors, in vain I attempted to shake them off by the most strenuous exertions: it was useless; I was

surrounded and overpowered, my turban was torn rudely from my head, and my arms were bound so tightly with it that I thought the blood would have burst from under my nails. I desisted at last, and remained passive in the hands of the soldiers. My hour is come, and my fate has led me on thus far to desert me at last! thought I; it is the will of Bhowanee and of Alla, why should I resist?

Seeing me quiet, the Rajah addressed me.

“Ah, Ameer Ali,” said he; “what is this I hear of thee, that thou art a Thug, a common murderer? can this be true of one who was looked up to in Jhalone as a merchant and a respectable man? What hast thou to say? Speak, man, and prove if thou canst to me that the accusations I hear against thee are false.”

“Rajah,” said I, “I know not who hath poisoned thy mind against me or mine; is there any one in your city who can speak one word against me? Have I not been fair and honourable in my dealings with all, and with thyself too? have not I managed villages and brought them to prosperity from desolation; and can any one, young or old, in this Durbar say that I have ever wronged him, or defrauded him of a fraction? Rajah, none can say this; and

therefore why am I and my old father thus disgraced in the eyes of the city, and torn from our houses in the midst of the rejoicings of marriage?"

"*I accuse thee not,*" said the Rajah; "Bhugwan alone knows whether what I hear is the truth or not; but witnesses are many against thee and the old man; let them speak, and we will afterwards decide in your case. Bring them forth!" cried he to an attendant; "one by one let them give their evidence before these unhappy men, we desire no secrecy in this matter."

There was a moment's pause in the assembly, and every eye—a hundred eyes were upon us. I looked to my father, to see the effect his situation had on him; but I read no hope in the glance he threw on me; his energy had deserted him, and he looked like a convicted felon long before he was so in reality; he returned my anxious and meaning glances by a stare of stupid apathy or extreme fear,—I know not which; and it was pitiable to behold him, for his venerable and respectable appearance but ill assorted with the disgraceful situation he was in. I turned away from him to look at the man who entered, and then I felt that my doom

was sealed. I have never mentioned him, but he had been connected with our gang from the first as a Tilhaee, or scout, and had afterwards assisted as a Bhuttote on many occasions. His name was Sooruj; he had accompanied me on all my first expeditions, and had served under my father for some time before I became a Thug; he therefore knew every particular of my career; and until I became a Pindharee described every event with minuteness and fidelity, omitting not one nor adding in any way to those I had been so deeply concerned in. He offered to point out the spots upon which travellers had been destroyed, declared the amount of booty we had gained on many occasions, and ended by denouncing both my father and myself as the greatest leaders in Bundelkhund, as men who could take the field at any time with two hundred followers or more, and as cruel and remorseless Thugs. He dared me to disprove his words, and indeed I quailed under his accusations; for they were true, and truth searches the heart and overwhelms the guilty. But against my father he was the most bitter. "Look on him, Rajah!" cried he; "look on this hoary wretch; one would think that, old as he is, he would have

ceased to deprive his fellow-creatures of life ; that he would have spent the remainder of his days in propitiating Bhowanee by sacrifices, and his own Prophet by prayers ! yet it has not been so. Within the last two months he has returned from an expedition laden with spoil, and the last man he strangled was one of thine own subjects, Oh Rajah,—one who was respected and beloved here, and whose bereaved family will rue this day that I have declared his fate in your Durbar.”

“ One of my subjects ! ” cried the Rajah ; “ thou canst not mean it. Speak ! and let not fear prevent your disclosing the truth.”

“ Fear ! Rajah, I know it not. If I feared him, that old man, should I have dared to speak as I have done ? Listen ; you knew Jeswunt Mul, one of the most respectable of the shroffs of Jhalone ? ”

“ Knew him, oh messenger of ill tidings ! Jeswunt Mul is not dead ? ”

“ Ask *him*, ” said the man hoarsely ; “ or stay, ask the other man you have here ; let him be brought forward, he will tell the tale ; I saw it not. But Jeswunt Mul will never speak more, and let those who believe the good man safe at Saugor shave their moustachios and

mourn, for he will never more be seen. Yes, he is dead, and *that* old man looked on while he writhed out his last agony under the roomal of the Bhuttote ;” and he pointed at my father, while he regarded him with a look of grim and revengeful pleasure.

There was a general shudder through the assembly, as the deep tones of the informer’s voice fell on the ears of those who heard it ; and “Jeswunt Mul dead !” was repeated by many in an incredulous tone as they drew into knots and whispered together. Nor was the Rajah himself least struck by the melancholy information. He sat on his musnud in silence, though it could be seen by the working of his features how much he was affected. But he aroused himself at last.

“Thou didst not then see this murder ?” said he to the informer.

“I did not, Maha Rajah ; but send for Bodhee, he will relate the particulars.”

Bodhee ! thought I, then there is indeed no hope. Until his name was mentioned, I had a faint idea that the accusation might be a fabricated one ; especially as I had heard nothing of the sahoukar’s fate from my father : but Bodhee had been with him, and he was the

chief of the Lughaees, and it was more than probable that he had dug the grave for the victim.

“Let Bodhee be brought forward,” cried the Rajah.

He came; his fetters clanked as he moved, and it was not until he had advanced into the midst of the Durbar that he beheld my father and myself bound and as criminals. The sight staggered him, and well it might; he had been trusted by us, raised to the rank he held by my father, and ever treated by him as a son, though he was of a different faith to ours. His face was convulsed by his emotions—they might have been those of a faithful heart struggling against ingratitude; and I looked with a breathless anxiety to the first words which should fall from him. But before he spoke the Rajah addressed him.

“Miserable wretch!” said he, “your life has been spared on the condition that you speak the truth, and reveal, without reservation of a single circumstance, every deed of murder you have been engaged in: this has been promised you by the English, and you have now to prove that you will perform your engagement. If you do perform it, well; if not,

though the English are your protectors, I swear to you that you shall be dragged to death by my elephants ere a ghurree of time has passed over you. Bid the elephant be brought!" cried he to an attendant; "and see that the chains are ready. By Gunga! there will be work for him ere long: and now," continued he to the approver, "knowest thou aught of the death of Jeswunt Mul of this town,—he who used to manage my private affairs, or if he indeed be dead? Speak, and remember that truth alone can save you."

There was a breathless silence; my father gazed at the informer with an intense anxiety; it was evident to me that he thought one word from him would seal his fate for ever, or that, should he deny the deed, he would escape. Earnestly, imploringly he looked at him, and the informer was well nigh overcome; he trembled in every limb, and the big drops of sweat stood out on his face, while the veins of his forehead swelled almost to bursting.

"Speak, Bodhee!" said my father in a hollow voice,—yet still he smiled,—"speak, and tell the Rajah that his poor servant Ismail is not guilty of this deed."

“Silence!” exclaimed the Rajah; “gag him if he attempts to utter a word to influence the informer; we will do justice in this matter; and you, Meer Sahib, (turning to a respectable-looking person who was seated near him,) you shall be able to tell the Sahib-logue that justice can be done in the Durbar of Jhalone. Bring up the elephant,” he cried to the attendants; “and do you, Bodhee, look your last on the earth and sky, for by Gunga, I swear, thou art nigh to death if thou deceivest me. I read it in thy face that this matter is known to thee.”

But still Bodhee hesitated: there was evidently a struggle within him whether he should die in defence of his old protector, or betray him to save his own life. For a moment the former feeling prevailed; he turned to the Rajah, and said distinctly and firmly, “May I be your sacrifice, Maha Rajah! I know nothing of this matter: of other murders I can tell you, but I know naught of this.”

“He lies!” said the other approver; “he was with Ismail Jemadar; he is afraid to speak out, and has lied to you, O Prince.”

“You hear him,” cried the Rajah to Bodhee; “you hear what your fellow Thug says; yet, much as you have deserved death, I give you

a few moments more: the shadow of the verandah is now close on my musnud,—till it reaches it thou shalt live—beyond it, one finger's breadth, and you die!”

There was not an eye in the crowd that was not fixed on the advancing shadow; barely a hand's breadth of light remained, and the Thug gazed on it as though he were fascinated by the eye of a tiger. My father! oh he was fearful to look on; his eyes were glazed—his lips were tightened across his teeth—fear, *agony* was depicted in his countenance in stronger lines than I had ever before seen. I could not look on him—his face was altered, and his usual bland expression had been usurped by that I have described. I felt sick, I could have died I thought; and would that I *had* died, to have been spared what followed.

“Fool!” cried the other approver, “will you sacrifice your life for those who will be instantly put to death?” He spoke in Ramasee.

The words rallied the man to whom he addressed them, and they saved him.

“Pardon, pardon!” he cried; “O, mighty Prince, I have told lies. Jeswunt Mul is indeed dead; these hands dug his grave and bore his yet warm body to it.”

“Ai Bhugwan! Ai Seeta-ram!” cried the Rajah, “and is it even so? My poor friend, and art thou dead?” and for a moment or two he wept. “This is womanly,” said he, rallying himself: “proceed, O kumbukht! let me know all, and what share *he* had in it.”

“We met the Sahoukar at ——,” said the Thug. “Ismail well knew that if we were all seen by him he would suspect us, so he sent the greater part of the band out of the village, and prevailed upon Jeswunt Mul to come and sleep in our camp, instead of remaining where he was; he went to the village and brought him away himself, else he would not have come. The grave was dug long before he arrived, and he had not been an hour with us after the sun had set, when he was strangled in the Jemadar’s presence by two Bhuttotes, and his two servants shared the same fate. I buried them all. The Sahoukar’s pony we sold the next day for twenty-five rupees; and we got but little else, for he had no money but in hoondees, which we burned.”

“Enough, enough,” said the Rajah; “this is ample proof.”

“Nay, if your greatness requires more proof, I can give you some now,” continued the ap-

prover : “ look at the Jemadar’s hand ; he wears on it a ring he took from the body himself, and it may be recognised even by you, Maha Rajah.”

My heart sunk within me at this new and desperate stroke of fortune. I saw the ring torn from my father’s finger ; all examined it : a Sahoukar who was in the assembly declared it to have belonged to Jeswunt Mul, and, more than all, his name was engraven on its inner surface.

“ Enough !” again cried the Rajah, “ I know it myself ; I could have sworn to that diamond among a thousand. Away with him ! chain him to the elephant, let him be dragged through the town, and proclamation made that he was a Thug.”

“ Stay,” cried the Syud, who had not as yet spoken, “ he may have something to urge in his defence ; ask him and hear him.”

“ Speak !” cried the Rajah to my miserable father ; “ speak, O kumbukht !”

And then my father’s proud spirit broke out. With the certainty of death before his eyes he quailed not. While hope remained of life, he had clung to it as every man will ; and when I had expected a grovelling entreaty for his life to be

spared, from his previous demeanor, he asked it not, but gloried in the cause for which he died.

“Yes,” said he, drawing himself up, while his eye glistened proudly, “I scorn to die with a lie upon my lips. I killed Jeswunt Mul because he was a villain, as you are, Rajah! because he employed Thugs, and would not reward them, but wrung from them every rupee he could, as you do. I have murdered hundreds of men because they were given into my hands by Alla, but I never destroyed one with the satisfaction I did your friend. Ay, you were friends and brothers in guilt, and you know it. My life! I care not for it. What has an old man to do with life? his enjoyments are gone, his existence is a burthen to him. A short time and nature would have claimed me; you have anticipated the period. Yet, O Rajah, Bhowanee will question you for this deed—for the destruction of her votary. My blood be on your head, and the curse of a dying man be with you! You have deceived me, robbed me, shared my spoils, taken the produce of murder—nay, be not impatient, you know it is the truth, and that Alla, who is the judge of all, knows it also. He will cast your portion in Jehanum,

as a kafir; and Bhowanee will rejoice that the destroyer of her votary writhes in the torments of the damned."

"Gag him! strike the kafir's mouth with a shoe!" roared the Rajah in a fury, more like that of a beast than a man, as he foamed at the mouth; "away with him! and let his son look on his dying agony."

And they dragged us both forth; I should not say my father, for his step was firm. I struggled against my tormentors, but it availed me not. "One word, my father!" cried I to him as we were brought near each other; "wilt thou not speak to thy son?"

He turned his head, and a tear stood in his eye. "I leave thee, Ameer Ali; but thou knowest a believer's Paradise, and the joys which await him—the seventy virgins and everlasting youth. Thou art not my son, but I have loved thee as one, and may Alla keep thee!"

"No more!" cried the rough soldiers, striking him on the mouth, and dragging him forward.

"Revenge me!" exclaimed my father in Ramasee; "tell the English of that monster's conduct to us, and when he is torn from his seat of pride, my soul will be happy in Paradise."

He spoke no more ; I was held forcibly, so that I saw the end of that butchery. They secured him by a chain round his loins to the fore-foot of the elephant, and they tied his hands behind him, so that he could not save himself by clinging to it. He still continued repeating the Kulma ; but now all was ready—the Mahout drove his ankoos into the head of the noble beast, which uttering a loud scream dashed forward. A few steps, and my father's soul must have been in Paradise !

Note.—The Rajah of Jhalone died from an inveterate leprosy, which all Thugs declare to have broken out soon after the death of the Thug in the manner described, and that it was a judgement upon him sent by Bhowanee.

CHAPTER XIV.

King Richard.—My conscience hath a thousand several
tongues,

And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

* * * * *
Methought the souls of all that I had murdered
Came to my tent."

RICHARD III. Act v. Sc. 3.

SAHIB, can I describe to you the passions which then burned in my heart? I cannot. A thousand thoughts whirled through my brain, till I thought myself mad; perhaps I was. Revenge for my father was uppermost; and oh that I could have got loose: by Alla! unarmed as I was, methinks I would have sprung on the Rajah and strangled him. But resistance was unavailing; the more I struggled, the tighter

my arms were bound, until they swelled so that the pain became excruciating, and I well nigh sunk under it. I suffered my guards to lead me away from the Durbar: I was thrust into a vile hole, and at last my arms were unbound.

That day—Alla, how it passed! Men gazed at me in my cage as though I had been a tiger, and mocked and derided me. The boys of the town hooted me, and thrust sticks at me through the iron gratings. One and all reviled me in the most opprobrious terms they could devise,—me! the respectable, nay the wealthy, to whom they had bowed before, when I basked in the sunshine of the Rajah's favour—but I was degraded now. Alas! my dreams, my forebodings had come to pass—they had been indefinite shadows—this was the reality. Alla! Alla! I raved, I called upon Azima's name, I implored those who still lingered about my prison to fly and bring me news of her, and to comfort her; and I cursed them when they derided me, and mocked my cries. Azima, the name that might not have been breathed by mortal out of the precincts of my zenana, became a word in the mouths of the rabble, and they jested on it, they loaded it with obscene abuse, and I heard it all. In vain I strove to stop my ears,—it pro-

voked them the more ; they shouted it close to the iron bars, and spat at me. Night came, and I was left in my loneliness. I should have been in her fond embrace—now I shared the company of the rat, the lizard, and the scorpion. It was in vain that I courted sleep, to steep my senses in a temporary oblivion of their misery ; my frame was too strong, and my anguish too great, for it to come to me. I wrestled with my agony, but I overcame it not, and I had to drink the bitter cup to the dregs. At last the morning broke ; I performed the Namaz : the dust of the floor served me instead of sand or water for my ablutions. Water I had none ; I had begged for it, for my mouth was parched and dry with anxiety, yet no one gave it. Again the court was filled ; old and young, women and children, all came to look at the Syud—to look at Ameer Ali the Thug—to deride him, and torment him ! But I was now sullen ; like a tiger, when his first rage, after he has been entrapped, has subsided, I cowered into the corner of my cell, and covered my face with my waistband, nor heeded their savage unfeeling mirth, nor the bitter words they poured out against me. In vain was it that I now and then looked around to see whether

one kind pitying glance rested on me. Alas! not one; every face was familiar to me, but the eyes either spoke a brutal satisfaction at my sufferings, or turned on me with the cold leaden stare of indifference. I tried to speak several times, but every murmur was hailed with shouts from the rabble before me, and my throat was parched and my tongue swelled from raging thirst.

The whole day passed—I had no food, no water. It was in the height of the burning season, and I, who had been pampered with luxuries, who in my own abode should have drunk of refreshing sherbets, prepared by Azima, was denied a drop of water to cool my burning throat. In vain I implored those nearest to me, in words that would have moved aught but hearts of stone, to intercede with the Jemadar who guarded my prison to allow me a draught of the pure element. I might as well have spoken to the scorching blast that whistled into my cage—bringing with it clouds of dust, which were increased by the unfeeling boys when they saw I shrank from them. Thus the day passed: evening came, and still no water, no relief, no inquiry into my condition. Had I been placed there to die?

And no sooner had the thought flashed across my mind than I brooded over it. Yes, I was to die! to expire of thirst and hunger; and then, oh how I envied my father's fate! his was a quick transition from the sorrows and suffering he had undergone during one short hour, to Paradise and the houris.

And from evening, night. I had watched the declining sun, till its last fiery and scorching beams fell no longer on my prison-floor—I watched the reddened west until no glare remained, and one by one the stars shone out dimly through the thick and heated air—and I thought I should see the blessed day no more, for I was sick and exhausted even to death. I lay me down and moaned, in my agony of spirit and of body, and at last sleep came to my relief. For a time all was oblivion; but horrible dreams began to crowd my prison with unsightly shapes and harrowing visions; my life passed as though in review before me, and the features of many I had strangled rose up in fierce mockery against me,—faces with protruding tongues and eyes, even as I had left them strangled.

Why describe them to you, Sahib? why detain you with a description of the horrors

of the scenes which rose to my distempered fancy, and at last woke me, burning as though a fire raged in my bowels and would not be quenched? But morning broke at last, and the cool air once more played over my heated and fevered frame, and refreshed me. Yet I was still in agony;—who can describe the sufferings of thirst? Hunger I felt not: thirst consumed me, and dried up my bowels. How anxiously and impatiently I looked for the first man who should enter the court where my prison was! One came, he passed through and heeded not my piteous cries: another and another; none looked on me, and again I thought I was to die. Another came; I called, and he turned to regard me. He was one that I knew, one who had eaten of my bread and my salt, and had been employed about my house, and he had pity; he had a remembrance of what I had done for him: he came, and looked on me. I spoke to him, and he started, for my voice was hollow, and thin and hoarse. “Water!” cried I, “for the sake of the blessed Prophet, for the sake of your mother, one drop of water! I have tasted none since I was confined.”

“Alas!” said he in a low tone, “how can it

be, Meer Sahib? the Rajah has threatened any one with death who speaks to you or brings you food.”

Again I implored; and I who had been his master prostrated myself on the ground and rubbed my forehead in the dust. He was moved—he had pity and went to fetch some; fortunately no one saw him, and he brought a small earthen pot full, which I drank as though it had been that of the well of Paradise. Again and again he took it and refilled it; and at last he left me, but not before he had promised to visit me in the night, bring me a cake of bread if he could, and, more than all, news of Azima and of my house.

The next day passed, and I had no food. I treasured up the water which had been left with me and sipped it now and then; but by nightfall again I was in torment. Yet I had hopes, for I knew that the young man would not deceive me; he had sworn by his mother’s head to bring me food, and he could not break his oath.

And he came. I had sat watching, with that anxiety which can only be known by those who have been in a situation like mine, listening to every distant footfall, to every noise, as though it were the step of him I looked for. I have

said he came ; he was muffled in a blanket, and had stolen in unobserved by the lazy sentinel at the gate ; he brought me food, a few coarse cakes, and an earthen pot of milk. “ Eat ! ” said he in a low tone ; “ I will sit here, and will tell you the news you bade me inquire for afterwards. I was ravenous, and I ate ; coarse bread, such as I should have loathed three days before, was now a luxury, sweet and grateful ; I ate it, drank the milk, and was thankful ; and I called him and blessed him for his venturesome daring, and for his gratitude to one who could no longer do him a kind turn. “ And the news, Gholam Nubbee ? can you tell me aught of *her* and my child ? ”

“ My news is bad, Meer Sahib, and I am the unwilling messenger of tidings which will grieve your soul and add to your misery.”

“ Say on,” said I : “ tell me the worst ; tell me she is dead, and you will only say what my soul has forewarned me of.”

He paused for awhile. “ You must know it sooner or later, Meer Sahib—she is dead.”

“ And my child ? ”

“ She is with the good Moola who protected your wife when she had no longer a house to

cover her, and who performed the last rites of our faith to her when she was dead.”

“No home!” cried I; “they did not drive her forth?”

“They did, Meer Sahib. The Rajah sent soldiers, your house was stript of everything, and your gold and silver, they say, was a prize he little expected; your wife and child were turned into the street, with only the clothes they had upon their persons. But to her it little mattered, for I have heard she never spoke from the time she knew of your father’s fate and the cause of your imprisonment. They say she sat in stupor, like a breathing corpse, without speaking a word to say where her pain was.”

“Enough!” said I, “go; may Alla keep you! I would now be alone, for grief sits heavy on me.”

Then she was dead—my Azima, my beloved!—she for whom I could myself have died,—she whom I had loved as man can only love once—she was dead; she had known that I was a Thug, and that had killed her. It was well—better far that she should have died, than lingered on to be scoffed at and insulted as the

wife of one who was now a convicted murderer. Had she lived I could never have dared to approach her, for she was pure, and I—!

I may say I almost rejoiced at her death, Sahib; I did not grieve as I should have done had the blow fallen on me while I was yet in prosperity—then it would have been hard indeed to bear; but now I was altered, and she was dead, and again I say it was well. Alla in his mercy had taken her from her scene of suffering, almost before she knew to its full extent the horrible reality. And my child too was safe; she was in friendly hands, and the Moola would be a father to her.

The day after the nocturnal visit of my humble friend, food was allowed me; it was scanty to be sure, but still I existed, though worn down by sufferings, which I have no words to express, to a shadow of what I was. Three months passed thus, and they appeared to me like years when I looked back on them.

At the end of this time I was taken to the Rajah's Durbar. Few were the words he spoke to me, but those were bitter ones; for he had shared my spoil, taxed me for protection, and, after putting my father to death, he had plun-

dered my home, and his booty was the accumulation of mine for years past. I say my father, and yet he had told me he was not my parent. But what mattered that now? he was dead, and the mystery of my birth, if any had ever existed, was gone with him. What mattered it too who was my father? I was alone in the world; not a tie, save one, bound me to existence. My daughter was with strangers, and in a few years she would forget me,—truly I might say I was alone.

I was in the Rajah's Durbar—I had no friend; no one of all those by whom he was surrounded, who had formerly courted me, eaten of my bread, and flattered me that I was yet to rise to greatness under his patronage—not one spoke for me, not one interceded to avert my shame. The Rajah spoke to me.

“Ameer Ali,” said he, “I had trusted thee, I had thought thee honest (how he lied as he spoke!), I had believed thee a rich and fortunate merchant; but, O man! thou hast deceived me, and not me alone, but thousands, and thou art a Thug and a murderer. Still, because I have a lingering sentiment of kindness towards thee, I do not seek thy death; justice has been satisfied in the destruction of

the hoary villain who made thee what thou art, and who led one who might have been an ornament to the world to be a wretch upon whose head is the blood of hundreds. Yes, Ameer Ali, I speak truth, and thou knowest it. And though I desire not thy death, yet thou canst not be released without a mark on thy brow that men may know and beware of. Throw him down," cried he to the attendants, "and let him be branded!"

They threw me down. Sahib, what could my attenuated and wasted frame do against men who had suffered no misery like mine? I struggled, yet it was unavailing; they held my arms, and legs, and head, and a red-hot pice was pressed upon my forehead; it was held there as it burnt down to the bone, ay my very brain seemed to be scorched and withered by the burning copper. They took it off, and raised me up. Alla! Alla! the agony that I endured—the agony of pain, and, more than that, of shame—to be branded publicly that the world might think me a thief—to have a mark set on my forehead that I must carry to my grave—a mark only set on the vile and on the outcasts from society—Sahib, it was a bitter cup to quaff!

“Away with him!” cried the Rajah, “away with him! Release him at the boundary of my territory. And mark me,” he continued, addressing himself to me, “I have given thee thy life, Ameer Ali; go, and be wise; learn by what has happened to be an honest man for the future; and, above all, remember that if ever thou art seen in Jhalone again, or in any of my towns or villages, nothing will be able to save thee from the feet of an elephant.”

He rose and strode out of the Durbar; and in pain and misery, I was conducted in two days to the frontier of his country and unbound. Two rupees were given to me, and again the wide and cruel world was before me. I hurried from my late keepers. I bound my turban over my still burning and aching brow, so that man might not see my shame, and took the road before me. I wandered almost unconscious of anything, save the pain I was suffering, until night fell around me, and I directed my steps to a village, the lights of which were a short distance before me. Exchanging one of my rupees, I sat down at the shop of a Bhutteara and satisfied my craving appetite; there I slept, and when I arose I was refreshed, and again believed myself to be Ameer

Ali. The morning breeze blew fresh on my face as I took my way out of the town; the refreshing rest of the night had invigorated me, and I bounded along with a light heart—yes, with a light heart,—for I was free! I had no thought for the past now. It was my fate which had been fulfilled: what had been written in my destiny had come to pass. As I proceeded, a jackass brayed on my right hand, and I hailed the favourable omen with a joy I can feebly express. Yes, great Bhowanee, mother of men! cried I aloud, I answer to thy omen; I am ready, and again devoted to thy service. I have sinned against thee; I had wilfully avoided thy warning omens, led on by an irresistible destiny and by a proud heart. I have been punished, and have bought a dear experience; but henceforward no votary of thine breathing shall excel Ameer Ali in devotion to thee; and therefore, great goddess, vouchsafe the Thibao and Pilhoo. And they were granted; the omen on the right was followed by that on the left, and I felt that I was pardoned, and again accepted as a Thug.

And so you believe, Ameer Ali, said I, that your not observing the omens in the instances

you related was the cause of your father's death and your misfortunes?

Assuredly, Sahib; I was a sceptic till then, as I have told you, but I was now no longer one; had I not cause to believe in the truth of the omens? and, had I obeyed them then, should I have the heavy crime I had committed still rooted in my heart? No, no! omens cannot, dare not be disobeyed; and I have never known an instance in which they were, or where a band has been led to destroy a person against the wishes of Bhowanee, that they were not all punished by her vengeance, either with domestic misfortune, imprisonment, or death. Ask any Thug you know, and he will tell you the same. I never doubted omens afterwards, and have allowed some rich prizes to escape me, because I feared that they were not completely propitious.

Well, Sahib, to continue. I pressed forward: I again untied my roomal, for that had never quitted my waist, and I welcomed it to my grasp as I should have done the embrace of an old and valued friend. With such omens, thought I, I cannot be unsuccessful; and over any single traveller, were he Roostum himself,

I can gain a victory. I had but one rupee and some pice; my clothes were in rags about me, and I must have others before I could venture to associate myself with Thugs, and hope to lead them.

But I travelled long, and met no person alone; and when noon came, and the sun's heat had overcome me, I lay down under a tree by the road side, near which was a well; and having washed and bathed and said the Namaz, I waited to see what chance would throw in my way. There I sat a long time, but no one passed me, and overcome by fatigue I dropped asleep. I was awakened by a touch from some one, and looking up I beheld a middle-aged Mussulman gazing upon me. I arose rapidly, and returned his "Salam Aleikoom" as kindly as he had given it. Fortunately my face remained well wrapped up, and the brand on my forehead could not be seen; he took me to be a traveller like himself, and as he was weary, he sat down and we entered into conversation such as usually passes between persons situated as we were. After he had been seated for a few minutes, he loosed a small wallet from his shoulder, and opening it displayed some cakes and mango pickle, to which he seemed

to be inclined to do ample justice ; but seeing that I looked wistfully at them he invited me to join his repast, which I was right glad to do, as I had fasted since the morning. When we had finished our meal, he said to me, " Meer Sahib, you say there is no water for some coss in the direction I am going ; and therefore, if you will kindly watch my clothes and arms, I will bathe in this well."

" Surely," I replied ; " I am in no hurry to be gone, and you will not delay me." As I said it he began to strip, and taking with him a lota, he descended the steps of the well, and I soon after heard the splashing of the water as he poured it over himself.

Now is my time, thought I ; he will be defenceless, and will fall an easy prey to me ; and I prepared my roomal for work.

He soon returned, and began to dress. I loitered near him, till I saw him take up his garment and put both his arms into the sleeves to draw it over him. It was a capital opportunity, and I closed behind him as if to assist him ; he turned to me, and as he had just accomplished his purpose, I had finished mine. The roomal was about his neck, and in a few moments he was dead at my feet ! I had no

time to lose ; so hastily stripping the band from his waist, in which there seemed to be money, I dragged the body to the edge of the well, and threw it in. I then arranged his clothes at the head of the steps, as though he had taken them off to bathe, and left them there ; his lota I left also with them ; and taking up his sword and shield, I girded the first to my waist, and the shield to my back, and pursued my way at as quick a pace as I could. No one will imagine he has been murdered, thought I ; the clothes on the brink of the well will cause it to be supposed that he died in the water ; and I chuckled over my success and strode along joyfully. But, the more to avoid detection, I struck off from the road I was travelling, and seeing the groves and white temple of a village at some distance I bent my steps towards it ; there I purchased some goor, and ate the tupounnee, as a good Thug ought to do, and after that I opened the humeana to see what my good fortune had sent me.

And so you murdered the first man who had shown you any kindness after your misfortunes. Oh, Ameer Ali, you are indeed a villain ! you ate of his bread and salt, and

murdered him! The recompence of a Thug certainly.

But what could I do, Sahib? I should have starved most likely had I not killed him. Besides he was the first traveller I met after those good omens; he was neither blind nor lame; assuredly therefore he was bunij. It must have been his fate to die, or I should not have gone to sleep under that tree. Had I met him in the road, I should have hesitated to attack him; indeed, unarmed as I was, I dared not have done so. But, as I was saying, I examined the humeana; I found in it nineteen rupees, a gold nose-ring, and two gold rings for the fingers which were worth at least forty rupees. Ul-humd-ul-illa! I cried, this is rare fortune; here is enough to last me for three months, and to provide me with new clothes; and it will be hard but in that time I find out some of my brethren.

I searched around the village to endeavour to find some traces of Thugs in the mango and tamarind groves by which it was environed; and though I discovered some fire-places with the peculiar marks of my brethren in them, yet they were old, the rain had more than half washed them away, and the marks would have

been undistinguishable to a less experienced Thug than myself. I could discover no further clue from them, though I walked for some time in the direction they pointed.

Wandering along the next day, I reached Calpee on the Jumna, and sitting one morning at the shop of a pān seller, some persons stopped at it, and talking among themselves, I understood that they were going to Chutterpoor. Chutterpoor, thought I,—what an owl I have been! there must be Thugs there, and I had forgotten it. So I immediately determined if possible to accompany them. I watched them to a bunnea's empty shop, before which, in the street, were tied four tattoos and some bullocks; and without ceremony I told them I had overheard their conversation, that I was also going to the town to which they were journeying, and if they would allow me and pardon my intrusion, I should be glad to travel in their company, as I was alone, knew not the road, and was afraid of robbers.

“Since you are alone, you may come, and welcome,” said the man I addressed. “But we are going by Bandah, which is not exactly in the direct road to Chutterpoor, and our bu-

siness may detain us there a day or two ; if, therefore, delay is of no consequence to you, come with us ; you seem to be a soldier, and we are poor merchants who will be glad of your protection."

"Such as I am, good sir," said I, "I am at your service, and will gladly accompany you to Bandah."

"Good!" replied the man; "we start early, and you had better be with us betimes; or you can spread your carpet here,—as you please."

"I will do the latter," replied I, "and be with you by the evening."

Bandah! thought I; another place full of Thugs—at least it used to be. I shall see at any rate, and if I find any, I may then alter my route.

I joined them in the evening, as I had promised, and we reached Bandah in a few days by long marches. Here they declared they would stay four days, so that I had ample time before me to search the place for Thugs, should any reside there. Nor was I disappointed in my hope of meeting them. I was sauntering through the town in the evening of the day we arrived, when I met Hoormut, an old follower of Ganesha; he did not at first recognise me, as may readily be imagined, and when I gave him our token of recognition he stared as

though I had been an apparition; however he was soon convinced of my reality, and I accompanied him to his house. The relation of my adventures and mishaps occupied a long time, and after I had finished them I naturally asked for an account of my old associate Ganesha. What I heard was gratifying to me: Hoor-mut declared him to be in misfortune, abandoned by his followers, and that he was wandering with one or two men somewhere in the neighbourhood of Saugor, preferring the precarious chance of booty in the jungles between that place and Nagpoor, to frequenting the more open and travelled country. Next followed questions as to my present plans, and when he heard I was alone and travelling with merchants, of course it naturally followed that some plan should be undertaken for their destruction.

“Look you, Meer Sahib,” said he, “I believe I can muster as many as fifteen Thugs, in and near this place. I am not suspected as yet, but the country is getting too hot for us, and we must either quit it or give up Thuggee, which no man, you well know, can do after he has eaten the goor; the others are of the same way of thinking, and we had determined that

we would leave this place for good after the rains, and go wherever our fate might lead us."

We soon afterwards separated for the time, Hoormut promising to collect the men by the next evening.

I joined him again by the time appointed, and found the whole assembled. I was received with exultation, for they had wanted a leader in whom they could confide, and mine was a name which, in spite of my recent misfortunes, they could look up to. I knew none of them, but they swore on the pickaxe to follow me; Hoormut vouched for their several capabilities and fidelity, and I was satisfied.

Our plan was soon formed. They were to go by two stages to a village they knew; there they were to wait for my arrival with the merchants. Beyond the village was a favourite bhil of theirs, and they would have everything prepared against our coming up.

All this being settled, we fixed the next morning (it being Monday and a lucky day) to observe the omens and open the expedition with due form. The omens were declared to be satisfactory, and by noon my new companions had started with their families for their station on the road.

CHAPTER XV.

“ So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear ;
Farewell remorse ; all good to me is lost.
Evil, be thou my good !”

MILTON.

WE strangled the merchants at the place we had fixed on, them and their bullock-drivers,— nine in all, and yet we were only seventeen Thugs ; but we were desperate. In our route we had travelled towards Jhalone, and I could no longer delay my project of proceeding thither, and making over my concealed treasure to the good Moola who had charge of my child.

Hoormut volunteered to accompany me ; and desiring the remainder of the band to make the

best of their way to Calpee, and there to await our arrival, we pushed on to Jhalone.

Considering the risk we ran, in approaching a place where inevitable death awaited *me* should I be discovered, we did well to disguise ourselves as Gosaeens. We covered our bodies with ashes, matted the hair on our heads with mud, hung gourds at our waist, and in this mean and wretched disguise we entered the town—that spot where I had passed so many years of happiness, where my fairest prospects had been blighted, and the resolutions I had formed of leading a new life and forsaking Thuggee rendered alike impracticable and distasteful to me. My emotions on entering the town, and more than all on passing the house where I had resided, were overpowering; but I rallied my heart; I passed through the city, and my friend and myself took up our abode for the day near a well outside the gates which was not far from the spot where I had buried my treasure. We had selected the best disguise possible for my purpose; we were visited during the day by some Hindoos, who came, some out of curiosity, and a few to offer alms to us; my companion replied to their inquiries and declared me to be under a vow of silence,

which satisfied them, and they departed, leaving us to prosecute our plans.

As the evening approached, I strolled towards the trees under which was deposited the sum I had hoarded up to serve me at any time of need. It was a deserted burial-place, overgrown by custard-apple bushes and other brushwood, and the rank grass had sprung up from the frequent rain. My heart beat quick as I approached the spot ; my hoard might have been discovered, and if it had been removed my child would be a beggar, dependent upon the charity of strangers ; she might even be thrust into the street, to herd with the vile and worthless, when the care of her became irksome or expensive to her present protectors. But anything, thought I, is better than that she should accompany me, where a life of hardship would be her portion, and where she could not escape the contamination which scenes of guilt and murder would effect in a short time, and from which, alone as I was, I could not protect her.

I reached the tomb in which, by removing a stone, I had placed the vessel containing the money. I hardly dared look at the well-remembered spot, hardly dared attempt to remove the stone ; but I did remove it, and, O joy of

joys, there was my treasure undisturbed! I hastily seized the earthen vessel, and crawled with it into the thickest of the underwood ere I ventured to open and examine it. I had forgotten what it contained, and the contents surpassed my expectations. I found thirty ash-ruffees and four small bars of gold, a box containing two strings of pearls of some value and some jewels, and tied up in a rag were some loose stones of value, one of them a diamond of great lustre and beauty. The jewels I determined to keep, as they might be afterwards of use to me, not only from their value, but to enable me to assume the character of a dealer in precious stones, which is always a respectable calling, and for which, in the jewels before me, I had ample stock for trade. I replaced the vessel and its precious contents, which could not have been worth less than a thousand rupees; and I felt my heart lightened of a load, both at seeing my treasure safe, and at the assurance it gave me that by means of it my daughter would be decently provided for. I returned to my companion, who had been anxiously watching my proceedings, and he too rejoiced at my good fortune.

I did not proceed into the town till it was

dusk: the gates, I knew, would be open until long after dark, and I went alone to avoid any chance of being remarked. I soon reached the house of the Moola, when, abandoning my character of a Gosaeen, I asked for alms in a lusty voice in the name of Moula Ali of Hyderabad. Fortunately the old Moola was sitting alone in his verandah; I saw him through the open gate, and advanced rapidly, shutting it behind me. He was engaged in reading his Koran, and was rocking himself to and fro, apparently absorbed in the book before him, so that he did not observe my approach; nor was he aware of my presence till I had prostrated myself before him.

“Punah i Khoda!” he exclaimed; “what is this, a Gosaeen? thou must be mad, good friend; or what seekest thou with the old Moola? Speak, thou hast almost frightened me, and disturbed my meditations on the holy volume.

Pardon, Moolajee!” I cried; “you see one before you who has risked his life to speak with you, and you must listen to me for a few moments. I know you well, though you do not recognise me in this disguise.”

“I know thee not, friend,” he said; “never-

theless, if I can do aught to serve thee, speak ; yet it is seldom that the Hindoo seeks the house of the priest of the Moslem faith ; and I am in astonishment at thy garb and address."

"Moola!" I said, "I would fain speak with thee in absolute secrecy ; are we secure from interruption here ? Fear me not ; I come with good intent, and am not what you think me, but one of thine own faith ;" and I repeated the Belief.

"Strange, most strange is this," said the old man rising ; "I doubt thee not : no one would do the old Moola harm ; and so, as thou requirest secrecy, I will but fasten the outer gate and join thee instantly." He did so, and returned.

"Moola," said I, when he was once more seated, and was prying into my face with a look of mingled curiosity and wonder, "Moolajee ! O Wullee Mahomed ! dost thou not recognise me ?"

"Thy voice is familiar to mine ears," said the old man, "yet I remember not thy features. Who art thou ?"

"Mine is a name which may hardly be pronounced in Jhalone," I replied ; "but we are alone. Have you forgotten Ameer Ali ?"

“Punah!” exclaimed the Moola, sidling away from me to the edge of his carpet; “Punah i Khoda! do I behold that bad and reckless man?”

“Bad I may be, Moola,” said I quietly; “and reckless I certainly am; yet I wish thee no harm. You were kind to one I loved—you have my child in your house—it is of them I would speak, not of myself. Tell me, for the sake of Alla, whether my child is well—tell me whether she lives, and I will bless you.” I gasped for breath while he replied, lest I should perchance have to hear of further misfortune.

“This is madness, Ameer Ali,” said he; “know you not that your father’s fate awaits you if you are discovered here?”

“I know, I know all,” said I; “and I have braved everything. I have sought you despite of danger—for my heart clove to my child and I would fain hear of her. Ah, Moola, think not of what I was, and be merciful to me.”

“Unhappy man!” he cried; “thy crimes brought with them their own reward; but I will not speak of the past. Know then that thy daughter is well; but she grieves still for thee and for her mother, whom Alla in mercy

removed from her sufferings before she knew her degradation.”

“Shookr Khoda!” I exclaimed: “ah Alla, thou art merciful even to me. And my child is well, and remembers me?”

“She does, Meer Sahib; she often speaks of you, but we have told her you are dead, and she no longer thinks of you as one whom she may ever meet again.”

“And you are right, Moola,” said I; “you are wise in having done this. May Alla repay your kindness to a deserted child, for I cannot. I have sought you for a purpose which you must promise to agree to, even before I speak it—it is the only request I shall ever make for my child, and from henceforth you will never see my face again nor hear my name.”

“Speak,” said the Moola; “I promise nothing, Ameer Ali; thou hast deceived thousands, and the old Moola is no match for thee in deceit.”

“Briefly then,” said I, “there was a small treasure which I buried in a field here long ago: I have returned and found it safe. It is a trifle, yet it is of no use to me; and I would give it over to you, both as a portion for my

daughter when she is married, and as some provision for her until that can be effected."

"The spoil of the murdered," said the old man, drawing himself up proudly, "can never enter the house of the Moola; it would bring a curse with it, and I will have none of it. Keep it yourself, Ameer Ali, and may Alla give you the grace to use it in regaining the honest reputation you have lost."

"No, no," cried I; "the money was my wife's; she had hoarded it up for our child; she brought it with her from the Dukhun, and it has remained as she placed it in the vessel. I swear to you that it is honest money; would I curse my child with the spoil of murders?"

"Swear to me on the Koran that it is, and I will believe you, Ameer Ali, but not else;" and he tendered me the holy book.

I raised it to my lips; I kissed it, and touched my forehead and eyes with it. I swore to what was false; but it was for my child. "Are you satisfied now?" I asked; "now that you have humbled me by obliging me to swear?"

"I am," he replied; "your trust shall be carefully and religiously kept. Have you the money with you?"

“No,” said I; “but I will go and return with it instantly. Admit me alone; I will cough at your gate when I arrive.”

I hastened to the spot I have before described; I hastily seized my treasure and returned to the Moola: he was waiting for me at the gate of his house, and we entered it together.

“Here is all I have,” said I, pouring out the contents of the vessel on the carpet; “it is not much, but it is the only portion of my wealth which remains to me.”

“Think not of the past, Meer Sahib, what happened was predestinated, and was the will of the All-powerful!”

“I have indeed no alternative but to submit, good Moola. But my time is short, and night advances; ere morning breaks, I must be far away from this, where my associates expect me. One favour I would beg,—it is, to see my child: one look will be sufficient for my soul to dwell on in after years, for I am assured that it will be the last—you will not deny me?”

“I will not, Meer Sahib; she is now at play with a neighbour’s child in the zenana, and if

you will follow me I will show her to you. One look must be sufficient for you ; after that she is mine, and I will be a father to her. Follow me."

I did ; I followed him through a court-yard to the door of a second, which was the entrance to his zenana. I heard the merry voices of the children, as they played with light and joyful hearts, and I could distinguish the silvery tones of my precious child's voice, so like those of her mother, which were now silent for ever.

"We will not disturb them, Meer Sahib," said the Moola in a whisper as he pushed open the door gently ; "look in, so that you may not be seen ; you will easily distinguish your daughter."

Yes, she was there, my child, my beautiful child ! still delicate and fragile as she had ever been ; but her face had a joyous expression, and she was as merry as those by whom she was surrounded. Long, long I gazed, and oh, my heart yearned to rush in, and for the last time to clasp her to my bosom and bless her. But I restrained myself ; she would not, could not have recognised me in the disguise I wore, and I should have only needlessly alarmed and

terrified her. Yet I put up a fervent prayer to Alla for her protection and happiness, and I tore myself from the spot—dejected, yet satisfied that she still lived and was happy.

“Enough!” said I to the Moola when we regained the outer apartment; “I now leave you; be kind to my child, and Alla will more than repay you for aught of care or anxiety she may cause you. What I have given you will be ample for a dowry to her in marriage with any person you may select—any one who may be ignorant of her father’s shame.”

“I will; and rest assured that wherever you are, whatever your after-lot in life may be, you never need give one anxious thought about Meeran; for I again repeat it, I am now her parent, and she has also found another mother.”

“I believe you,” said I; “and if ever I am again favoured by fortune and in a situation to come to you without shame to her, you shall take me to her and present a father to his child: until then you hear not of me again.”

I left him. I had borne up against my feelings, I had struggled against and overcome them so long as I was with him; but as I passed his threshold the fond love of a parent would not be stifled: I was overcome by bitter

grief, and I sat down and wept, for I felt that I had seen my child for the last time,—and it was even so; I have never beheld her since, Sahib, nor ever been able to get a clue to her fate. May Alla grant she is happy, and knows not of mine! But of this more hereafter.

I wept! yes, I sat at the threshold of what had been my own home and wept, yet not aloud. My eyes were a fountain of tears, and they welled over their lids, and coursed down my rough visage, and fell hot upon my hands. My memory was busy with the past, that period of bliss when all earthly joy was my portion, and with it wealth and fame. All was gone—gone like the fleeting dream—a mockery, which gorgeous or blissful as it may be while it possesses the sleeping senses, is broken—even the remembrance of it lost—by awakening to reality. Alla help me! I said in the bitterness of my heart at that moment; I am indeed desolate, and it matters not what becomes of me: I have no hope.

How long I thus sat I know not; but arousing myself by a sudden thought of the danger I was in, I rose up, took one long, sad survey of what was once my own, but which was now deserted; and hurrying away from the spot, I

reached the gate as it was about to be shut, and soon afterwards joined my companion.

At length we reached Calpee, where we found the band and their families ; and at a council of all assembled, after many plans of proceeding had been discussed and many plans proposed for our final settling-place by the different members, I opened to them one of my own which I had long entertained. It was, to proceed to Lukhnow by a boat, which could be easily hired, and to remain there, as it was a city which promised an ample harvest to a Thug ; and, from the not over-strict character of its government, a more likely one than any other to enable us to pursue our calling with security. The plan was agreed on ; and the next morning I betook myself to the Ghaut, to hold communication with the Manjees of the boats, and to strike a bargain for their conveyance of my party.

All was arranged to the satisfaction of my associates ; and at the hour appointed, which had been declared a lucky moment by some astrologer employed by the boatmen, the anchor was raised, and a fair wind carried us rapidly over the smooth waters.

Day after day passed in this manner, and

there was a kind of dreamy pleasure about the voyage which was indescribably grateful to me. Here I had no alarms, no fatiguing journeys, no anxiety; my mind became calm and unruffled, and I was once more at peace.

At Lukhnow we lived for some time upon the proceeds of our last booty, and I established a small traffic in precious stones upon those I had brought with me; but it yielded small returns to me, and I only delayed commencing operations till I could fix upon some settled plans. I had erred deeply in leaving my own country; if I needs must have left it, I ought to have gone to the Dukhun: there I should have succeeded; I should have risen,—for the Dukhun Thugs required leaders, and, as you may have heard, whenever a Hindostan Jemadar led them, they behaved well and became the terror of the country. Here, I was in a place of which I was ignorant, and I dared not venture to take to the roads. At length I thought I would attempt the same system we had practised so successfully at Hyderabad. No sooner had the idea possessed me than I longed to put it into execution; the more so, as my associates received it with ardour, and seemed strongly convinced of its practicability. We

were unknown in that crowded and vicious city, lived in an obscure part, and could never be suspected in our daily perambulations through the bazaars in search of bunij. And so it turned out; we were in great luck for two months, money flowed in upon us, and we had killed upwards of thirty persons, mostly travellers to distant parts, whom we decoyed from the serais: and as we succeeded, I had more money at my disposal and was enabled to bribe several of the serai-keepers; and, by allowing them to participate to a large amount in our gains, I secured admission to the serais, and had facilities of speaking with travellers which I should never have enjoyed had I neglected to secure their goodwill. But fortune was against me despite of this cheering commencement, and we did not long enjoy our easy and profitable career.

We had one day taken out of the city a party of seven travellers, we being sixteen Thugs in number. I well remember it was a Friday, an unlucky day at best. Among the Thugs was an old man, one of the old Murnae stock, a capital Bhuttote, who had joined us a short time before; he had known my father, and me when a child, and had recognised me in a street

in Lukhnow, which led to his joining us. We had taken the travellers to a favourite bhil of ours about four coss distant, and were in the act of strangling them,—some even lay dead on the ground, and the rest were in their last agonies,—when by the merest chance a body of horse, which were on their way from the city to a distant pergunnah, came upon us. We had grown too confident from our frequent successes,—it was still far from morning, and we had neglected to place scouts. The horse came upon us unheard and unseen, and, as I have told you, caught us in the very act. Nine of us were seized after a faint resistance; the rest, fortunate men! made their escape. Our hands were bound behind us and we were dragged into the city, objects of wonder and terror to the inhabitants. The bodies were brought in after us: and two of the travellers who had been only half strangled, and were revived by the horsemen, gave so clear an account of our whole proceedings, how we had inveigled them and accompanied them on their march till we attacked them unawares, that no doubt remained of our guilt; and after our brief trial had been concluded before the Kazee, we were cast into prison, to await our fate. The old

Thug and myself had been bound together, and we were in this state thrust into one of the narrow cells of the jail. There we were told we should remain till the pleasure of the king was known regarding us.

CHAPTER XVI.

“The sigh of long imprisonment, the step
Of feet on which the iron clanked, the groan
Of death, the imprecation of despair.”

BYRON.

“*Queen.*—O speak to me no more!
Thy words like daggers enter in mine ears.”

HAMLET, Act iii. Sc. 4.

AGAIN I was in prison; and although not in such wretched plight as I had been at Jhalone, for the cell was roomy and tolerably clean, yet still it was a prison,—confinement to my limbs and to my spirit; a conviction which threatened my life hung over me; and as I saw no prospect of escape I was resigned to die, and to meet my fate like a man and a Thug who had been familiar with death from his childhood. We sat in silence, and my wretched companion, old as he was, clung

to the idea of life with a fondness that I felt not. He had no ties on earth to bind him to it, he had never had any, yet he longed to live. I *had* possessed them,—they were all broken, and life had no charms for me. I could not say that I wished for death, but I was indifferent to my fate.

A week passed thus—a long, interminable week. In vain was it that I implored my jailers to relieve me from suspense, to tell me whether I was to live or die : either they knew not, or their hearts were hardened towards me; they would not tell me.

But after the expiration of this period, we were not long ignorant of our sentence. We were informed that seven of our companions had been hanged, as they had been detected in the act of strangling the travellers. But there was no evidence against us so conclusive; the merchants who had escaped the fate of their associates could not swear that we had murdered any of those who had perished; and the horsemen who had captured us knew no more than that we were of the party. If this had been all, we should probably have been released; but one of the miserable men who had been executed, in a vain attempt to preserve his life,

confessed his crimes ; and by this last stroke of ill fortune we were convicted, and the decree went forth that we were to be imprisoned for life.

Despair seized on my faculties at the announcement of this hard sentence. Death in its most horrible shape would have been courted joyfully by me in preference to it. To linger out years and years in that wretched hole, never to be free again ! I could not believe it : I tried to shut out the dreadful reality from my mind, but in vain. I implored that they would lead me to instant execution, that I might be impaled, or blown away from a gun, or hung,—anything rather than have my miserable existence protracted in the solitude and suffering of a prison. But my entreaties were laughed at or scorned. I was loaded with a heavy chain, which confined my legs, my companion the same, and we were left to our fate. Still my restless spirit held out to me hopes of escape,—hopes that only mocked me, for every plan I formed became utterly impracticable, and this only increased my misery. One day I bethought me of the money I had collected before I was seized. It was hidden, and it was not improbable that my hoard had remained undis-

covered. With this I fondly hoped I should be enabled to bribe one of my jailers ; and the idea comforted me for many days, while I waited for an opportunity to put it into execution.

There was one among the guards of the prison, a young man, who was always kinder in his deportment to us than any of the others. The food he brought us was better, and the water always pure and in a clean vessel. He used to cheer us too sometimes with the hope that our imprisonment would not last so long as had been decreed ; and he instanced the cases of several criminals who had been sentenced like us, but who had been released when the memory of their crimes had ceased to occupy the minds of the officers in charge of the prison. He had our clothes washed for us, and did a thousand kind acts—trifles perhaps, but still more than we experienced from any other of his companions.

It was with him, therefore, that I proposed to my fellow-captive to try our long-brooded and cherished scheme of deliverance. The next time it was his turn to attend us, I begged he would come to the cell at night or in the evening, when he would be secure from observation, for that I had something particular to

communicate to him. He came in the evening of that day, and seated himself, muffled in a dark-coloured blanket, close to the bars of our cell.

“You have something to say I think,” said he in a low tone, “and I have done your bidding; I am here.”

“I have, good Meer Sahib,” said I, (for he was also a Syud;) “listen, for what I would communicate to you will be for your benefit, if you will enter into my plans.”

“Say on,” replied the youth; “you may command my utmost exertions.”

“To be brief then,” I continued, “you must endeavour to effect our escape.”

“It is impossible,” he said.

“Not so,” cried I; “nothing is impossible to willing hands and stout hearts. You can manage everything if you will but listen to me. When we were apprehended, we had saved a round sum of money, which is concealed in a spot I can tell you of, if you will be faithful to us. Half of it shall be yours, if you will only aid us.”

“How much is it?” he asked.

“Upwards of five hundred rupees,” said I; “it was securely hidden, and no one can have dis-

covered it. I repeat, half of it shall be yours if you will assist us."

"How can I?" cried he, in a tone of perplexity; "how is it possible that you can pass these doors and walls, even were you as free as I am at this moment?"

"Leave that to me," said I; "do you accept the offer?"

"I will consider of the matter, and will be here at this time tomorrow, to give you a final answer."

"May Alla send you kind thoughts to the distressed! we shall look for your decision with impatience."

The next evening he came at the same time, and seated himself as before.

"What would you have me do, Meer Sahib?" he asked; "I am ready to obey your commands if they are practicable. First, however, I must be secure of the money you have mentioned; I must receive it before I peril my situation, and, more than that, my life in your behalf."

"Listen then, Meer Sahib," said I; "I trust you,—you are a Syud and I also am one; you dare not deceive me, and incur the wrath of Alla."

“I will not, by the Prophet, whose descendant I am,” said he; “were the Koran in my hands this moment, I would swear upon it.”

“No, no,” said I, “do not swear; the word of an honest man is far more binding than an oath. I believe that you are true, and therefore it is that I trust you. First, then, as regards the money; do you remember two old tombs, one of them much broken, which stand near the river’s brink over the north side of the city, about a cannon-shot from the wall?”

“I do, perfectly.”

“Then,” I continued, “in that broken one is an earthen vessel, containing the money; the vault where of old the body of the person over whom the tomb was erected was deposited, can be opened by removing four stones, which are loose, from the eastern side of it; they are neither large nor heavy, and you can manage the matter alone. In the cavity you will find the vessel, and the money is in it. I shall require half for my expenses. Now all I ask you for the present to do in return is, to procure us two small and sharp files and some ghee; and when we have cut through our chains, and one of these bars, I will tell you how you can aid us further.”

“I will perform all you wish,” said the youth; “and Inshalla! you shall have the files to-morrow night by this time, if I find that your statement about the money is true.”

He then left us, and we anxiously and impatiently awaited his coming the next day. Nor did he disappoint us.

“I have come, as you see, Meer Sahib,” he said; “and behold, here are the files for you—they are English, and new and sharp; here too is the ghee. I have fulfilled my promise.”

“And the money?” I asked.

“Without it you would not have seen me to-night, I can tell you, Meer Sahib. I have got it; the amount is five hundred and fifty rupees, and you shall be welcome to your share when you have got out of this hole. And how do you intend to manage this part of your scheme?”

“Are the gates of the prison shut at night?” I asked.

“No,” he replied; “that is, the gate is shut, but the wicket is always open.”

“And how many men guard it?”

“Only one, Meer Sahib; the rest sleep soundly after midnight.”

“It is well,” said I; “we can but perish in the attempt, and I for one would gladly die,

rather than linger out a wretched existence here."

"And I also," said my companion.

"I fear I cannot assist you," said the man: "yet stay, suppose you were to attempt your escape when I am on guard. I shall have the last watch tomorrow night."

"May the blessing of Alla rest on you!" said I; "you have anticipated my thoughts. We will attempt it then, and may the Prophet aid us. All night we will work at our irons and one of these bars, and tomorrow night we shall be free. Go, kind friend, you do but risk detection in being seen here."

He left us, and we set to work with a good will to cut the irons on our legs and the bar. All night we worked, and the morning's light saw the iron bar nearly cut through at the top and bottom; to cut it at the top, one of us sat down by turns, while the other standing on his shoulders filed till his arm was tired. Despite of the ghee however, the files made a creaking noise; we tried to prevent this by using them slowly, but in the excitement of the moment this was at times forgotten, for we worked hard for our liberty.

The morning broke and we rested from our

labour; one strong shake would have separated the bar, and our irons were so nearly cut through at the ankles and the waist, that a slight wrench would have divided them. Our friend we knew was faithful, for he had proved himself so, and we enjoyed a silent anticipation of our eventual triumph.

“This time tomorrow,” I exclaimed, “we shall be free, far from Lukhnow, and the world again before us, wherein to choose a residence!”

My companion was as full of hope as I was, and we passed most of the morning in debating whither we should go, and calling to mind the names of our former associates who would welcome us and join us in seeking new adventures. It was about noon, I think, that a party of the soldiers of the prison, headed by the Darogha, approached our cell. My heart sunk within me as I saw them coming, and the haste with which they advanced towards us increased my alarm and apprehension. “We are lost!” said I to my companion; “they have discovered our plans.” He did not reply, but despair was written on his countenance.

The Darogha applied his key to the lock; it was opened, and the whole party rushed in and seized us.

“What new tyranny is this?” I exclaimed; “what new crime have we committed, that we are again to be ill-treated?”

“Look to their irons!” cried the Darogha to his men.

“You have been busy it seems,” said he to us, when they found them in the state I have described. “Let me give you a piece of advice; when you next file your irons, either use more ghee or make less noise. But you will hardly have another opportunity I think. Search them well,” continued he to the men; “see where these instruments are which they have used so cleverly.”

They stripped us stark naked, and the files were found in the bands of our trowsers through which the string that ties them runs. The Darogha examined them carefully.

“These are new, Meer Sahib, and English. Inshalla! we will find out who supplied you with them. The fellow who has done this assuredly has eaten dirt.”

“We brought them here with us,” said I doggedly. “Ye were sons of asses that ye did not search us when we entered your den of tyranny.”

“We may be sons of asses,” he replied grin-

ning, "but we are not such owls as to believe you, O wise and cunning Syud; Thug as you are, we are not going to eat dirt at your hands. Some friend you have had among my men; one is suspected; and if these files can help us to trace him—and it is probable enough—he had better say the Kulma, for his head and shoulders will not long remain together. But come," said he to his men, "your work is only half done; examine every foot of these bars; for my worthy friends here, rely upon it, have not half done their business."

They obeyed him, and, as you may suppose, soon found the bar which had been cut.

"Enough!" said the Darogha. "You were a fool, O Meer Sahib, for this wild attempt. Had you been content to bear your deserved imprisonment, mercy might in time have been shown to you; but now, give up all hope; you have forfeited that mercy by your own imprudence, and you will long live to repent it. Bring them along," said he to his men; "we must put them into narrower and safer lodgings."

Ya Alla, Sahib, what a place they led us to! A narrow passage, between two high walls, which but just admitted of a man's passing

along it, contained, about half way down, two cells, more like the dens of wild beasts than aught else. They were more strongly grated than the last we had been in, and were not half the size. Far heavier irons than those we had last worn were fastened on our legs by a blacksmith, and we were thrust into our horrible abodes.

“ Now,” said the Darogha, “ get out if you can, Meer Sahib. If walls and iron bars can hold you, you are pretty safe here I think.”

They left us, and once more we were cast into the abyss of despair; nor was there one ray of hope left to cheer our gloomy and wretched thoughts. Here am I to live, here am I to die, thought I, as I surveyed the narrow chamber,—I who have roamed for years over the world, I who have never known restraint. Alla! Alla! what have I done that this should be? O Bhowanee, hast thou so utterly forsaken Ameer Ali? I cast myself down on the rough floor, and groaned in agony. I could not weep, tears were denied me; they would have soothed my overburthened soul. A cup of misery was before me, and I was to drain it to the dregs. Hope had fled, and de-

spair had seized and benumbed every faculty of my mind.

Months rolled on. Though only a strong grating of iron bars divided me from my old companion, we seldom spoke to each other ; at most it was a word, a passing remark hazarded by the one, and scarcely heeded by the other, so absorbed were we in our misery. I ate and drank mechanically, I had no craving for food ; and what they gave us to eat was of the coarsest kind. The filth which accumulated in our cells was removed only once a week, and it bred vermin which sorely tormented us. Oh that I could die ! I cried a thousand times a day. Alas ! my prayer was not granted.

The second year of our captivity passed—the same unvarying rotation of misery,—no change, no amelioration of our condition. We existed, but no more ; the energies of life were dead within us. I used to think, were I ever released, that I could not bear the rude bustle of the world ; that I should even prefer my captivity to its anxieties and cares. It was a foolish thought, for I often yearned for freedom, and occupied my mind with vain thoughts and plans for future action, should any lucky chance give me

my liberty; but no ray of hope broke in upon the misery of my dungeon.

I mean not to say that my companion, the old Thug, and I never conversed; we did so now and then; we recounted our exploits again and again, and by thus recalling mine to my memory, from the beginning of my career, I stored up in my mind the adventures and vicissitudes I have related to you. One day we had been talking of my father, and his parting words to me, "I am not your father," flashed across my thoughts. I mentioned the circumstance to the old Thug, and earnestly requested him to tell me what he knew of Ismail, and of my early state.

"What!" he asked, "so you know not of it, Meer Sahib? Surely Ismail must have told you all? And yet," continued he after a pause, "he would not have done it—he dared not."

"What can you mean," cried I, "by saying he dared not? Was I his son, or did he say truly when he declared I was not?"

"He spoke the truth, Meer Sahib. I know your origin, and it is just possible there may be one or two others who do also, and who are still living: one of these is Ganesha."

“Ganesha!” I exclaimed; “by Alla! my soul has ever told me that he knew something of me. I have striven in vain to bring any scene in which he was concerned with me to my recollection, and always failed. By your soul! tell me who and what I was.”

“’Tis a long tale, Ameer Ali,” said the old man, “but I will endeavour to remember all I can of it; it is one too which, were you not what you are, would horrify you.”

“My parents were murdered then?” said I, my heart sinking within me. “I have sometimes thought so, but my conjectures were vague and unsatisfactory.”

“You have guessed truly, Meer Sahib. But listen, my memory is still fresh, and you shall know all.

“Ismail, your father, as he called himself to you, became a Thug under Hoosein Jemadar, whom no doubt you remember. I well recollect the day he joined us, at a village not very far from Delhi; I was then a youth, and belonged to the band of which Hoosein was one of the best Bhuttotes.”

“I know Ismail’s history,” said I; “he related it to me.”

“Then I need not repeat it,” he continued.

“In time Ismail, by his bravery and wisdom, rose far above Hoosein, and became the Jemadar of a band of thirty Thugs. It is of this time I would speak. We were one day at a village called Eklera, in Malwa, encamped outside the place, in a grove of trees near a well. We had been unlucky for some time before, as it was the season of the rains, when but few travellers are abroad, and we were eagerly looking for bunij.

“Ismail and Ganesha had been into the bazar, and returned with the joyful news that a party was about to set off towards Indoor, and that we were to precede them by a march, and halt whenever we thought them secure to us. I and another Thug were directed to watch their movements, while the main body went on. The information was correct, and we dogged them till the third or fourth march, when at a village whose name I forget we found the band halted, and rejoined it. The party consisted of a respectable man and his wife and child, an old woman, and some young men of the village who accompanied them. The man rode a good horse, and his wife travelled in a palankeen. They were your parents, Meer Sahib.”

“Go on,” said I in a hoarse voice; “my me-

mory seems to follow your narration." O Sahib! I was fearfully interested and excited.

"Well," continued he, "not long after they had arrived, Ismail and Ganesha went into the bazar, dressed in their best clothes, to scrape an acquaintance with your father, and, as Ismail told us afterwards, this was effected through you; he saw you playing in the streets, gave you some sweetmeats, and afterwards rescued you from the violence of some of the village boys who would have robbed you of them. This led to his speaking with your mother, and eventually to his becoming acquainted with your father. The end of all was, that they agreed to accompany us, and dismissed the young men by whom they had been previously attended. Does your memory aid you now, Meer Sahib, or shall I finish the relation?"

"It does," said I, "most vividly as you proceed. But go on; without your assistance, I lose the thread of my sad history." He resumed.

"Ismail in those days always rode a good horse, as also did Ganesha. He grew fond of you, and you of him, and he used to take you up before him and carry you most part of the march, or till you became fatigued. This went

on for some days, but we were approaching Indoor, and it was necessary to bring the matter to a close; besides our cupidity was strongly excited by the accounts we heard from Ismail of your father's wealth, as he had told him that he carried a large sum of ready money with him. At last the bhil was determined. I could show it you now; it was close to a river, and, before the party had crossed, the jhirnee was given. We strangled them all. Ganesha killed your mother, the old woman was allotted to me; Ismail had his share also, and I believe it was your father. You had been riding upon Ismail's horse all the morning, at least after the rain had ceased, and when the jhirnee was given you were half across the river; I saw you fall, and as you did not move afterwards, I thought you were killed. You moved however, and Ganesha ran towards you; he threw the roomal about your neck, and was in the act of strangling you, when Ismail, who had uttered a cry of despair on seeing Ganesha's action, arrived just in time to prevent his deadly purpose. They had a serious quarrel about you, and even drew their swords; but Ismail prevailed, and led you to where the bodies were lying and being stripped by the Lughaees.

You became frantic when you saw your mother ; you clung to her body and could hardly be torn from it ; you raved and cursed us all, but terror overcame you at last, and perhaps pain also, for you fainted. Ismail, when the bodies had been disposed of, and the plunder collected, mounted his horse and took you up before him ; and turning off the road, we travelled in another direction.

“ How you ever bore that journey I know not ; you were a thin and delicate child, and we all said you would die ; but you bore it well, and when we reached a place in the jungle, I was sent to a village for milk, and you drank some. Here again Ismail and Ganesha had a second quarrel about you ; Ganesha said you were too old to adopt, that you would remember all that had happened, and that he would strangle you : and the abuse that you poured upon him made him still more savage. Again they drew their swords, and would have fought about you, but we prevented them.

“ You were taken away by me to a distance ; I rubbed your swollen neck, and Ismail gave you a strong dose of opium, which put you to sleep, and we again resumed our flight.

“ Ganesha and he were never cordial friends

after that day; they never acted in concert again until, as I heard, in your last expedition; and though they preserved an outward show of civility to each other, their hate was as strong as ever.

“Ismail took you to his home. He was married, but had no children; and as you grew up and improved under his kind and fatherly treatment, he became proud of you, and used often to say to us, that he regretted your father had left your sister behind when he undertook his fatal journey to Indoor.”

“My sister!” cried I, in an agony of apprehension.

“Yes, Meer Sahib, your sister. I, for one, heard your father say that he left her behind, as she was too young to be moved. You might get news of her at Eklera if you ever get out of this cursed hole.”

But he now spoke to one bereft of sense—of any feeling save that of choking, withering, blighting agony. Why did not my heartstrings crack in that moment? Why did I live to drag a load of remorse with me to my grave?

Yet it has even been so. I live, and I have borne my misery as best I could; to most I appear calm and cheerful, but the wound rankles

in my heart ; and could you but know my sufferings, Sahib, you would perhaps pity me. Not in the daytime is my mind disturbed by the thoughts of the past ; it is at night, when all is still around me, and sleep falls not upon my weary eyelids, that I see again before me the form of my unfortunate sister : again I fancy my hands busy with her beautiful neck, and the vile piece of coin for which I killed her seems again in my grasp as I tore it from her warm bosom. Sahib, there is no respite from these hideous thoughts ; if I eat opium—which I do in large quantities, to produce a temporary oblivion—I behold the same scene in the dreams which it causes, and it is distorted and exaggerated by the effects of the drug. Nay, this is worse to bear than the simple reality, to which I sometimes become accustomed, until one vision more vivid than its predecessors again plunges me into despair of its ever quitting me.

Sahib, after that fatal relation, I know not what I did for many days. I believe I raved, and they thought me mad, but my mind was strong and not to be overthrown. I recovered, though slowly, and again and again I retraced in my memory the whole of my life till

that miserable day on which I murdered my sister! It could have been no other.

I tried in vain to cheat myself into the belief that it was another, but no effort that I made could shake the conviction that it was she. My unaccountable recollection of Eklera—the relation of my father's death by the old man there—his almost recognition of me—and, more than all, the old and worthless coin for which I destroyed her, and which I now remembered perfectly,—all were undeniable proofs of my crime; and conviction, though I tried to shut it out, entered into my soul, and abode there. Alla help me, I was a wretched being! My hair turned gray, my form and strength wasted, and any one who had seen me before I listened to the old Thug's tale would not have recognised me two months afterwards. A kind of burning fever possessed me; my blood felt hot as it coursed through my veins; and the night, oh how I dreaded it! I never slept except by day, when exhausted nature at length claimed some respite. Night after night, for months and months, I either rolled to and fro on my miserable pallet, or sat up and rocked myself, groaning the while in remorse and anguish. No other act of my life rose up in judgment

against me—none but that one; I tried even to think on others, but they passed from my mind as quickly as they entered it, and my sister was ever before me.

You know the worst, Sahib—think of me as you will I deserve it. I cannot justify the deed to myself, much less to you; and the only consolation I have—that it was the work of fate, of unerring destiny—is but a weak one, that gives way before the conviction of my own guilt. I must bear my curse, I must wither under it. I pray for death, and as often too pray that I may live, and that my measure of punishment may be allotted to me here, that my soul may not burn in Jehanum. I may now as well bring my history to a close, to the time when, by accepting your boon of life, I became dead to the world.

My old companion died in the fourth year of our captivity. I would fain have had him deny the tale he told me of my father's destruction, but he would not; he was dying when I urged him to do so, and again declared in the most solemn manner that what he had related was true in every particular; and again he referred me to Ganesha, my mother's murderer, for confirmation of the whole.

He died, and I was left to solitude, to utter solitude, which was only broken by the daily visit of my jailor, who brought me food, and attended me during a short walk up and down the passage. This favour alone had I extorted after those years of misery, and it was grateful to me to stretch my cramped limbs, and again to feel the pure air of heaven breathe over my wasted features.

The seventh year had half passed; the Darogha of the jail was dead or had been removed; another supplied his place, and some amelioration of my condition ensued. I was removed from the lonely cell into one near where I had been first confined; it was more spacious and airy, and people passed to and fro before it. I used to watch their motions with interest, and this in some degree diverted my mind from brooding over the past.

In the twelfth year of my imprisonment the old king died, and his successor, the late monarch, ascended the musnud. Many a heart beat quickly and with renewed hope—hope that had almost died within the hearts of those wretches who were immured within the walls—and of mine among the rest. We had heard that it was customary to release all who had

been sentenced to perpetual imprisonment ; and you can hardly imagine, Sahib, the intense anxiety with which I looked for the time when the mandate should be issued for our release, or when I should no longer dare to hope.

It came at last ; after some days of weary expectation, the order reached the Darogha, and it was quickly conveyed to me. I was brought forth, the chains were knocked off my legs, and I was free. Five rupees were given to me, and a suit of coarse clothes in place of those which hung in rags about my person. After more than twelve weary years I issued from those prison walls, and was again thrown upon the world to seek my fortune.

“ Beware, Meer Sahib,” said the Darogha, as he presented me with the money, “ beware of following your old profession ; you are old, your blood no longer flows as it used, and what you have been you should forget. Go ! follow some peaceful calling, and fortune may yet smile upon you.”

I thanked him and departed. I roamed through the city till night-fall, and after satisfying my hunger at the shop of a bhutteara, I begged from him shelter for the night. It was readily granted, and I lay down and enjoyed

the first quiet and refreshing sleep I had known for years. I arose with the dawn and went forth,—whither I cared not,—all places in the wide world seemed alike to me. I knew no one, I could find no one who knew me in that large city, and I felt the desolation of my condition press heavily upon me. What to do, or whither to go, I knew not ; but a faint hope that I might discover some of my old associates if I could reach Bundelkhund impelled me to travel thither.

A change in my dress was soon effected. From a Kalundur fakeer I purchased a high felt cap and a chequered garment for a small sum ; and thus equipped, with a staff in my hand, I left the city by the north gate, and travelled onwards.

It was as I thought ; I was never without a meal, though it might be of the coarsest food ; and when I reached Jhalone, my little stock of money was nearly as large as when I had left Lukhnow. I went direct to the house of the Moola, for my thoughts were ever with my daughter, and my soul yearned to know her fate. Alas ! I was disappointed. His house was inhabited by another, whom I knew not, and all he could tell me was that the old

man had gone to Delhi he believed some years before, and that he had not heard any tidings of him since. I asked after his daughters, but the man knew nothing of them, except that one he had adopted had been married in Jhalone to a person who resided in a village of the country, but of his name or direction he was ignorant.

I turned away from the door,—I dared not pass my own, and I withdrew to an obscure part of the town where there was a small garden in which a Fakeer usually resided. Him I had known of old, he had eaten of my bread and received my alms, and now I was his equal. He will not recognize me, thought I, in this dress, and changed as I am no one knows me; I will seek him however, and if he is as he used to be I may learn some news of my old friends.

I found the Fakeer I sought; old I had left him, he was now aged and infirm; his garden, which he had always kept with scrupulous neatness, was overgrown with weeds and neglected, and he had barely strength remaining to crawl about the town for the small supply of flour or grain which sufficed for his daily wants. I was much shocked to see him thus, and representing myself to be a wandering Kalundur

desirous of remaining in Jhalone, I begged to be allowed to reside and share with him whatever I got. My offer was readily accepted, and there I took up my abode, in the hope that some wandering party of Thugs might pass Jhalone, to whom I could disclose myself.

Gradually I discovered myself to the old man; I led him to speak of old times and of persons by allusion to whom he must know I was a Thug. He did not hesitate to speak of them, and in particular of myself, whose fate he mourned with such true grief that I could control myself no longer; and to his wondering ear I related the whole of my adventures, from the time I had been released by the Rajah, to the period of my taking up my abode with him. And much had I to hear from him in return, much that distressed and grieved me; many of my old companions were dead, others had been seized and executed, and hardly one of the old leaders of Bundelkhund were in the country or in the exercise of their vocation: new leaders had sprung up, and he spoke in warm terms of a young man named Feringhea, who when I had last seen him was a mere boy.

Four months passed thus. To support the old Fakeer as well as myself, I was obliged to

perambulate the town daily, and I asked and received alms, given in the meanest portions, in the place where my hand had ever been open to the poor. A sad change in my fortune, Sahib! yet I bore up against it with resignation, if not with fortitude, hoping for better days and new adventures.

New adventures, Ameer Ali! I exclaimed; had not the punishments you had received turned your heart from Thuggee?

No, Sahib! cried the Thug with fervour; why should they? had not my heart become hardened by oppression and misery? They had aroused within me a spirit of revenge against the whole human race; I burned to throw off my wretched disguise and again take to the road—it mattered not whether as a leader or a subordinate, so that I could once more be a Thug. Nor was I old; true, my beard had become grizzled and gray, and care had seamed my countenance with many wrinkles; but I was still strong and powerful, and my hands had not forgotten their cunning. Four months I have said had elapsed, and as no Thugs came near Jhalone, I set off, with a few rupees I had saved from the produce of my daily alms, for Tearee, where I hoped to meet the Brahmin

astrologer who had so materially aided me in the affair of the pearl-merchant. His share of that booty had been duly remitted to him immediately on my arrival at Jhalone, and though I had never heard from him afterwards, yet I felt assured that the letter could not have miscarried.

I reached Tearee after many days. I knew that bands of Thugs were abroad, for I saw their fire-places and marks at many villages and upon the roads; but I met with none, to my disappointment, and on my arrival I hastened at once to the temple where I found the Brahmin; and, notwithstanding my misfortunes, I was kindly, nay warmly welcomed. The Brahmin still kept up his connexion with Thugs, and I learned from him to my joy that a band, under a Jemadar named Ramdeen, about twenty in number, had passed through the town only the day before, and were on their road towards the Nerbudda.

“You can easily overtake them, Meer Sahib,” he said; “and if your old fame as a leader fails in procuring you a welcome reception, a few lines from me may aid you.” And he wrote a note to the Jemadar, informing him who I was, and how I had been connected with

him of old. I did not long delay after I had received it, and again set off in search of my future companions. I came up with them on the second day, and warm indeed was the welcome I received; one and all were amazed to see me, whom they had long thought dead. I was clothed in decent raiment by them, admitted as one of their band, and treated as a brother. Truly their kindness was refreshing to my almost withered heart. Ramdeen insisted that I should take an equal rank with him in the band; and after the necessary ceremonies I resumed my roomal, and in a few days again ate the Goor of the Tupounee.

Sahib, you must by this time be weary of my adventures with travellers, and I met with none during my connexion with Ramdeen's party worthy of relation. We avoided the Company's territories and kept to those of Sindia; penetrating as far as Boorhanpoor, and on our return visiting the shrine of Oonkar Manduttee, on the Nerbudda. From this latter place we were fortunate in enticing a party of pilgrims, and a large booty fell into our hands at the bottom of the Jām Ghat, whither we escorted them on their return to Oojein. Upwards of four hundred rupees was my share of this: so again you see me inde-

pendent and fortune smiling upon me. But Ramdeen became jealous of me, and of my superior skill and intelligence. We had many quarrels, and at last I left him and determined, with what I had, to travel to the Dukhun, and to seek my fortune in the Nizam's country, where I knew that Thuggee still flourished unchecked.

But it was fated not to be so. My road from where I left Ramdeen lay through Saugor, and there I met with my old acquaintance Ganesha, at the head of a small band, apparently in wretched plight. I could but ill dissemble my feelings of abhorrence at meeting with him; my own misfortunes and history and the tale of my companion in imprisonment were fresh in my recollection; nevertheless I disguised the dislike I felt, though revenge still rankled in my heart, and I would gladly have seized any opportunity to satisfy it. Among his band was a Thug I had known in former days; he was weary of Ganesha, whose temper was not improved by age, and he advised me to put myself at the head of a few men he could point out to me, who would be faithful, and who he thought would prove the nucleus of a large band; for my name was still

fresh in the memory of the older Thugs, who would gladly flock to me when they heard I was determined to set up for myself without connexion with others. And he was right; in a few months I was at the head of forty men; and we were fortunate. Taking a new direction we passed through the territories of the Rewah Rajah, returning to our home, which we fixed in a village not far from Hindia, in a wild and unfrequented tract, where we were secure from treachery and from the operations against the Thugs then being carried on from Saugor.

Two years passed in this manner, and I was content, for I was, as I wished to be, powerful and actively employed. Two seasons we went out and returned laden with plunder, and the name of Ameer Ali was again known and feared. Another season and it shall be my last, said I; I had discovered some clue to my daughter, and thought (vain idea!) if I could only collect a few thousand rupees, that I could dare to seek her, to live near her, and to abandon Thuggee for ever. Why was I thus infatuated? what else could it have been but that inexorable fate forbade it? The destiny which had been marked out for me by Alla I was to fulfil, and I blindly strove against it. The vain purposes of man

urge him to pursue some phantom of his imagination, which is never overtaken, but which leads him on often by smooth paths and buoyed up by hope, till he is suddenly precipitated into destruction.

I had planned an expedition on a larger scale than ever, towards Calcutta, and we had sworn to Bhowanee to pay our devotions at her shrines of Bindachul and Calcutta; the omens were favourable, and we left our home in joy and high excitement. And what cared I then, though I knew that the English had set a price of five hundred rupees upon me? It was a proof that I was dreaded and feared, and I rejoiced that Ameer Ali, the oppressed and despised for a time, had again emerged from his obscurity, and I braved the danger which threatened me. I was a fool for this, yet it was my destiny that impelled me: and of what avail would have been precautions, even had I taken any? I knew that treachery could not reach me where I was, and I trusted to my apparently lasting new run of good fortune, and to the omens with which our expedition had begun, to escape apprehension in the districts of the Company's territories, where operations against Thugs were being carried on with much success.

Saugor lay directly in the route which we proposed taking, and it was here that the greatest danger was to be apprehended. I might have avoided it perhaps, but I trusted to the celerity and secrecy of my movements for a few days until we should pass it ; and as my band were unanimous in refusing to change the route after it had been determined on and sanctioned by favourable omens, I undertook to lead them at all hazards. We travelled by night therefore, and avoided all large villages, resting either in waste spots or near miserable hamlets. Nor did we seek for bunij,—the danger was too imminent for any time to be lost ; and though one or two persons died by our hands, yet this was rather to enable us to eat the Goor of the Tupounee, and to perform such ceremonies as were absolutely necessary for the propitiation of our patroness, and our consequent success.

CONCLUSION.

“ *Pistol*.—Trust none,
For oaths are straws, men’s faiths are wafer-cakes,
And Hold-fast is the only dog, my duck :
Therefore *Caveto* be thy counsellor ! ”

HENRY V. Act ii. Sc 2.

SAUGOR, I have said, lay directly in our route, and we reached a village close to it on the evening of a day of severe travel. We were fatigued already, but the town was now so close to us that we did not hesitate to push on, and we arrived at the well-known spot shortly after dark. Selecting an empty shed in as lonely a part of the town as we could, we cooked a hasty meal and lay down, determined to rise before dawn and again pursue our journey. One of

our number was set to watch ere we retired to rest, and we depended upon him to give us warning should any suspicious person be observed.

The night passed, and I arose, roused my followers, and long before day had dawned we were beyond the gates of the town. "See," said I to my friend, "our much-dreaded danger is past; we are now again on our way, and we shall leave this spot at least ten coss behind us before noon; beyond that there is nothing to fear, and we shall travel with light hearts." Alas! I spoke as my sanguine hope prompted me to do; but it was not fated to be as we thought. Again treachery had been at work, and when I conceived I possessed a band free from all suspicion, two traitors, as I afterwards heard, had already laid a deep plan for my apprehension. Of this however I will tell you hereafter; you are now with me on the road, and you see us urging our course with the utmost speed.

Already had we lost sight of the town, and before us was a broad, well-beaten road, which I well remembered; yet I feared so public a route, and determined to strike off into a bye path as soon as I could see one which

diverged in the direction we were going. We might have proceeded a coss or two perhaps, and the day was now beginning to dawn; a nulla was before us at a short distance, and as none of us had washed before leaving the town, I proposed that we should perform our ablutions there, the better to enable us to sustain the fatigue of the stage before us; my proposal was agreed to, and when we reached the running stream, one and all ungirded their loins and sat down by the water; we had not been engaged thus for more than a few minutes when a sudden rush was made upon us by a number of horse and foot soldiers, who must have been lying in wait for us on the road we were to travel.

I had left my weapons at some little distance from the water, and my first impulse was to endeavour to possess myself of them; but in this I was foiled. Two of my own men threw themselves upon me and held me, and as I vainly struggled to free myself some foot-soldiers seized me. I was thrown down and bound. The surprise was most complete. A few of my band drew their swords, and some blows were exchanged between them and the party who had come upon us, and a few of my Thugs were wounded; but

we were all overpowered, and the whole affair was concluded in less time than it requires to relate it; only a few of my men escaped.

Bitterly did I upbraid the men who had prevented my getting at my weapons. Had I but possessed them Ameer Ali would never have been taken alive; I would have sold my life dearly, Sahib, and sooner than have been seized I would have plunged my sword into my heart, and ended a life which had no charms for me, and which I only wished to prolong to wreak vengeance on mankind, the source of all my misery.

As I reviled them they mocked and jeered at me. "Where is now your journey to Calcutta, O Meer Sahib?" said one; "behold, the long travel is saved thee, and thou art returning to Saugor to live in a fine house and to keep company with many old friends who are in it." "Yes," said the other, "the Jemadar's day is past, and his wit deserted him when he must needs approach the den of the tiger, as if he would not be smelt out! Why didst thou come to Saugor, O Jemadar? Hadst thou forgotten the promise of reward and free pardon which was offered for thy apprehension? Truly we have done a good deed," said he to

the other, "and the Sahib-logue will be pleased with us."

But their idle talk was silenced by the leader of the party, who warned them to be careful, and not to boast, lest their expectations should not be realized; and they shrunk behind, unable to bear the glances of scorn and contempt which were cast on them by all; by *all*, I say, for even the soldiers who had seized us cursed the means of their success for having been treacherous and unfaithful to the salt they had eaten.

And thus in bitter agony of spirit, and indulging vain regrets at my senseless imprudence in approaching Saugor, they led me, bound and guarded, by the road I had just travelled, free then as the morning breeze which played on me. For the third time I was a prisoner, and now I saw no hope: I had retained some on each of the former occasions, but it all vanished now. Then I was young, and a young heart is always buoyant and self-comforting; but the fire of my spirit had long been quenched, and it was only in the wild excitement of a life of continual adventure and unrestrained freedom, when I resembled what I had formerly been, that it rekindled within me. Death

too was now before me ; for I knew the inexorable laws of the Europeans, and that no mercy was shown to Thugs of any grade,—how much less to me for whom a reward had been offered ! It was a bitter thought : I should be hung,—hung like a dog,—I who ought to have died on a battle-field ! *there* death would have been sweet, and followed by an everlasting Paradise. Alas ! even this hope deserted me now, and I felt that the load of crime with which my soul was oppressed would weigh me down into hell.

Who can describe the myriad thoughts which crowd into the heart at such a moment ? One by one they hurry in, each striving to displace the foregoing—none staying for an instant,—till the brain reels under the confusion. It was thus with me. I walked mechanically, surrounded by the soldiers, vainly striving to collect my wandering senses to sustain me in the coming scene, the scene of death, for I verily believed I should be led to instant execution : why should the mockery of a trial be given to one so steeped in crime as I was ?

A short time after our arrival at the town, I was conducted closely guarded to the officer who was employed by the English government to apprehend Thugs. A tall, noble-looking

person he was, and from the severe glance he cast on me I thought my hour was come, and that ere night I should cease to exist. I had prepared myself however for the worst; I saw no pity in his stern countenance, and I confess I trembled when he addressed me.

“ So, you are Ameer Ali, Jemadar,” said he, “ and at last you are in my power; know you ought of the accusations against you, and wherefore you are here? Read them,” he continued to an attendant Moonshee, “ read the list which has been drawn up; yonder villain looks as though he would deny them.”

The man unfolded a roll of paper written in Persian, and read a catalogue of crime, of murders, every one of which I knew to be true; a faithful record it was of my past life, with but few omissions. *Alla defend me!* thought I, there is no hope; yet still I put a bold face on the matter.

“ The proof, Sahib Bahadur;” said I, “ you English are praised for your justice, and long as that list is of crimes I never before heard of, you will not deny me a fair hearing and the justice you give to thousands.”

“ Surely not; whatever your crimes may be, do not fear that your case shall be inquired into.

Call the approvers," said he to an attendant ; " bring them in one by one, and the Jemadar shall hear what they have told me about him."

The first man who entered was an old associate of mine in former days, before my misfortunes commenced : he had been with me in the expedition just before my father had been put to death by the Rajah of Jhalone, which I have minutely described to you ; and he related the whole, from the murder of the Moonshee and his child, down to the last event, the destruction of the pearl-merchant. His story took a long time in relating ; and the whole was so fresh in my recollection, and he was so exact and true in its details, that I could not answer a word, nor put a single question to shake his testimony. In conclusion he referred the officer to the Rajah of Jhalone for corroboration of the whole, and he appealed to me to declare whether aught he had said was false. " Not only," said he, " do you know, Meer Sahib, that it is all true, but there are others as well as myself who can speak to these facts ; and know, moreover, that many graves have been opened, and the remains of your victims have been disinterred."

" Say *yours* as well as mine," I replied, thrown completely off my guard at last, and nettled by

the emphasis he had placed on the words "your victims." "You had as much to do with them as myself; besides, did you not aid that villain Ganesha when I would have saved the child of the Moonshee?"

"He has confessed!" cried many voices.

"Silence!" said the officer, "let no one dare to speak. Do you know, Ameer Ali, what you have said? Are you aware that you have admitted you are a Thug?"

"It is useless now to attempt to recall my words," said I doggedly; "make the most of them, for after this you shall wring no more from me; no, not by the most horrible tortures you can inflict."

The examination however proceeded. Others were brought forward who had known me or been connected with me in Thuggee, and at last those who had earned the reward of the government by betraying me. They had been associated with me for the last two years, and they related what I had done, and where the bodies of the murdered were lying. After this was finished, and all the depositions recorded, I was remanded to prison; and the better to secure me, I was not only loaded with irons, but confined in a cell by myself.

After many days, which elapsed without my being sent for, and when I had concluded that my fate was decided, the Moonshee whom I had seen in the court, with a Jemadar of Nujeeb's and two of the approvers, came to me.

"Ameer Ali," said the first, "we are sent by the Sahib Bahadur to tell you of your fate."

"I can guess it," said I,— "I am to suffer with the rest. Well! many a good Thug has thus died before me, and you shall see that Ameer Ali fears not death."

"You have guessed rightly," said the Moonshee, "there is no hope for you: your final trial will come on in a day or two, and there is such an array of facts against you, and the accounts from the Rajah of Jhalone so entirely agree with the statements of all the approvers, that it is impossible you can escape death: or, if you do escape it, nothing can save you from the Kala Panee."

"Death!" cried I, "death at once! Ah, Moonshee! you have influence with my judges, you can prevent my being sent away over the far sea, never to behold my country more, and to linger out the remnant of my days in a strange land, condemned to work in irons. These hands have never been used to labour; how

shall I endure it? death is indeed welcome, compared with the Kala Panee."

"But why should it be either, Meer Sahib?" asked the Jemadar; "your life or death is in your own hands: these men will tell you how they are treated by the master they serve, and you may be like them if you are wise."

"Never!" cried I; "never shall it be said of Ameer Ali that he betrayed an associate."

"Listen, Kumbukht!" said the Moonshee; "we are not come to use entreaties to one who deserves to die a thousand deaths, to one whose name is a terror to the country; you are in our power, and there is no averting your fate: an alternative is offered, which you may accept or not as you please; no force is used, no arguments shall be wasted on you. Say at once, will you live and become an approver like the rest, —have good clothes to wear and food to eat, and be treated with consideration,—or will you die the death of a dog? Speak, my time is precious, and I have no orders to bandy words with you."

"Accept the terms, Ameer Ali," said both the approvers; "do not be a fool, and throw your last chance of life away!"

I mused for a moment: what was life to me?

should it ever be said that Ameer Ali had become a traitor, and, for the sake of a daily pittance of food and the boon of life, had abandoned his profession and assisted to suppress it? No, I would die first, and I told them so. "Begone!" said I; "take this message to your employer,—that the soul of Ameer Ali is too proud to accept his offer, and that he scorns it. Death has no terrors for him, yet shame, everlasting shame has!"

They left me, and I mused over my lot. I was to die; that was determined. Did I fear death? not at first; I looked at the transition as one that would lead me to eternal joys—to Paradise—to my father and Azima. But as I thought again and again, other reflections crowded on my spirit: I was to die, but how? not like a man or a soldier, but like a miserable thief, the scorn of thousands who would exult in my dying struggles; and then I remembered those of the wretch who had been hung before my eyes when Bhudrinath was with me, and I pictured to myself the agony he must have suffered ere life was extinct—the shame of the death—the ignominy which would never leave my memory. All these weighed heavily on me. On the other hand was life—

one of servitude it was true, but still it was life; I should be protected, and I might once more perhaps be free, if the Europeans relented towards me, and I did them faithful service.

Thus I debated with myself for many days; at last I was warned that my trial would come on the next day; it was clearly the crisis of my fate, and, I must confess it, the fear of the horrible death of hanging, the dread of the Kala Panee, and the advice of the Moonshee, caused my resolutions of dying with the rest to give way to a desire of life. Ganesha too crossed my thoughts: I can revenge myself now, thought I, and his death will not lie at my door. I knew too how earnestly his capture was desired, and that I alone could tell where he was to be found, and of his probable lurking-places, in case he ever escaped from us. My determination was made, and I requested that the Moonshee who had formerly spoken with me on the subject might be sent for. He came, and I told him at once that I was willing to accept the alternative he had offered.

“ Ah! you speak like a wise man now,” said he, “ and if you exert yourself in the service you have embraced, and prove yourself faithful and trustworthy, you may rely upon it indul-

gences, as far as can be granted to a person in your condition, will be allowed to you hereafter ; but you must first deserve them, for with the Europeans nothing goes by favour."

" I am ready," I replied, " point out what I am to do, and you will find that Ameer Ali can be true to the salt he eats."

" Then come, it is still early, and I will take you at once to the Court, there you will receive your instructions."

My prison irons were struck off, and a light steel rod with a ring attached to it fastened about my right leg, so that it left me at perfect liberty to walk, but not to run, and I was duly admitted as an approver, under the threat of instant execution in case I ever neglected my duty, failed to give information where I really possessed it, or abused in any way the confidence which had been reposed in me.

" Know you aught of Ganesha?" said the officer to me.

" I do, Sahib Bahadur," I replied, " I know him well ; you have offered a reward for him as you did for me, and yet you know not that even at this moment he is within a few coss of Saugor."

" Can you guide my people to him?" he

asked. "Remember, this is the first matter with which you are entrusted, and I need not say that I require you to use your utmost intelligence in it. Ganesha is wary, and has hitherto evaded every attempt which has been made to apprehend him."

"I will undertake it," I exclaimed. "It is possible he does not know of my capture; and if you will give me six of your own men, I will disguise them, and pledge myself to bring him to you; and not only him, but Himmud, who is I know with him."

"Ha!" cried the officer, "Himmud also! he is as bad as the other."

"He is as good a Thug," I replied, "and more cannot be said. But we lose time; select your men, let them be the bravest and most active you have—their weapons may be needed. I will too ask you for a sword."

"Impossible," said he; "you must go as you are: what if you were to lead my men into destruction?"

I drew myself up proudly. "Trust me or not as you will,—Ameer Ali is no liar, no deceitful villain to the cause he serves. Trust me, and you make me doubly true to your interests; doubt me, and I may doubt you."

“Thou speakest boldly,” said he, “and I will trust thee. Let him have his own weapon,” he added to an attendant. “And now you must begone early, Ameer Ali; the men await you without.”

“This instant,—food shall not pass my lips till I have taken Ganesha.”

I left him. I found the men, six resolute-looking fellows, well armed; I stripped them of their badges of office, and made them throw dust on their garments so that it should appear they had travelled far. The iron on my leg I secured so that it should make no noise, and not be visible under my trowsers; and I put the party in motion.

It was nearly evening, and avoiding the town I struck at once into the open country. “If we travel well,” said I to the men, “we may be up with him by midnight.”

“Where is he?” asked the leader of the

31 .

At ——; he lives with the Potail there, and passes for a Hindoo Fakeer.”

“By Gunga! I have seen him then,” rejoined the fellow; “he is tall, and squints, does he not?”

“That is the man,” said I; “you would

hardly have thought of looking for him so near you?"

"No indeed! had we known it we might have captured him a week ago."

"Now you are sure of him," said I: "but we must be wary; will you trust me?"

"I will, but beware how you attempt to escape or mislead me."

"I have a heavy reckoning to settle with Ganesha—he murdered my mother!" was my only reply.

We reached the village in the very dead of night; everything was still, and it was perfectly dark, which aided my purpose, for my companion's face could not be distinguished, and my own approach to the Potail's house would not be noticed. "Now," said I to the Nujeeb, "you alone must accompany me; let the rest of your men stay here: I will bring Ganesha here, and then you must bind him. Do you fear me?" (for he appeared irresolute;) "nay then I will go alone, and tell your master that ye are cowards."

"That will not do either," cried the man, "I must not let you out of my sight; my orders are positive; so go I must; and if I do not return," said he to his associates, "do you make

the best of your way to Saugor alone, and say that I am murdered."

I laughed. "There is no fear," said I; "in half an hour or less we shall return: are you ready?"

"I am, Meer Sahib; lead on, and remember that my sword is loose in the scabbard. I may die, but thou shalt also."

"Fool!" said I, "cannot you trust me?"

"Not yet," he replied; "I may do so hereafter."

"Remember," I continued, "that you are neither to speak to Ganesha nor the other, if he is here. I will get them out of the house; after that look well to your weapon. If they attempt to escape, or show suspicion of our real errand, fall on Himmud when I ask you how far it is to Saugor: leave me to deal with Ganesha;—we are two to two, and Ganesha is a better swordsman than the other. You will remember this."

"I will," he replied; "I will stick by you,—I fear not now, for I see you are faithful."

A few more steps brought us to the Potal's house, and I called for him by name. "Jeswunt! Jeswunt! rouse yourself and come out, man. Thou knowest whom I am." I spoke in Ramasee,

which I knew he understood. He answered me from within, and soon after I heard the bars and bolts of his door removed, and he came forth wrapped in a sheet. "Who calls me?" he asked.

"I, your friend Ameer Ali," I replied; "where is Ganesha?"

"Asleep, within; why do you ask?"

"And Himmud?"

"Asleep also; what do ye want with either? and what brings you here, Meer Sahib, so late or so early, which you please? we thought you were half way to Calcutta."

"Ah," said I, "that matter has been given up; the Nujeebs were out, and there was risk. But go and rouse Ganesha, I have some work in hand for him, and have no time to lose; it must be finished by daylight."

"I understand," said the Potail, "some bunij, eh?"

"Do not stand chattering there, or your share may be forgotten, Potailjee; bring Ganesha to me,—or tell him I am here, he will come fast enough."

He went in. "Now be ready!" said I to the Nujeeb; "do as I do, and remember the signal."

I heard the Potal awaken Ganesha; I heard the growling tones of his voice as he first abused him for rousing him, and afterwards his eager question, "Ameer Ali here! ai Bhowanee, what can he require of me?" At length his gaunt figure appeared at the doorway. Ya Alla! how my heart bounded within me, and then sickened, so intense was my excitement on beholding him.

"Where art thou, Ameer Ali?" said he; "I can see nought in this accursed darkness."

"Here," said I, "you will see well enough by and bye when your eye is accustomed to it; give me your hand; now descend the step; that is right." We embraced each other.

"Are you ready for work?" I asked, "I have only two men with me, and we have picked up some bunij; there will be good spoil too if you will join us,—alone we can do nothing—there are four of them."

"Where?" he asked.

"Yonder, in the lane; I have pretended to come for fire."

"Who is that with you?"

"A friend; no fear of him, he is one of us."

"Does he speak Ramasee?"

"Not yet," said I, "he is a new hand,

but a promising one: but where is Himmut?"

"Within, snoring there, you may even hear him; wait for me a moment, I will go for my sword and shoes, and rouse him up. Four men you said, and we are five; enough, by Bhowanee! we will share the spoil."

"Before you are two hours older; be quick or they may suspect me."

He went in, and returned in a short time fully equipped; Himmut accompanied him, and we exchanged salutations.

"Now, come along," said I, "there is no time to lose."

"Hark ye!" said Ganesha, "there is a well in yonder lane, will that do for the bhil?"

"Certainly," I replied, "you will see the men directly." Soon after I had spoken we approached our party.

"Who goes there?" cried one of them.

"A friend—Ameer Ali!"

"Then all is right," was the reply, and in another instant we had joined them.

"There are your men, seize them!" cried I, throwing myself upon Ganesha with such violence that we fell to the ground together,

struggling with deadly hate; but two of the Nujeebs came to my aid, just as Ganesha had succeeded in drawing a small dagger he wore in his girdle, and as I had fortunately seized his hand.

“Bind him hand and foot,” said I, disengaging myself from him, “and gag him, or he may alarm the village by his cries.” This was done, and he was disarmed; a cloth was tied round his mouth so that he could not speak, and we hurried our prisoners along as fast as the darkness and the roughness of the road would allow.

None of us spoke, nor was it till the day had fully dawned that I looked upon Ganesha; then our eyes met, and the furious expression of his face I shall never forget. “Take the gag from his mouth,” said I to one of the Nujeebs; “let him speak if he wishes.” It was done.

“You are revenged at last, Ameer Ali,” he said; “may my curses cleave to you for ever, and the curses of Bhowanee fall on you for the destruction of her votary! May the salt you eat be bitter in your mouth, and your food poison to you!”

“Ameen!” said I. “You have spoken like Ganesha. I am indeed revenged, but the debt is not paid yet—the debt you owe me for my mother’s life. Devil! you murdered her.”

“Ay, and would have murdered you, when you were a weak puling child, but for that fool Ismail; he met his fate however, and yours is yet in store for you.”

“You will not see it,” said I; “and when I behold you hung up like a dog I shall be happy.”

“Peace!” exclaimed the leader of the Nujeebs; “why do you waste words on him, Ameer Ali?”

“Because I am glutting my soul with his sufferings,” I answered; “and, had I my will, I would stand by and taunt him till the hour of his death. Did he not murder my mother? and, if he had not, should I have murdered my sister? Have I not cause for deep and deadly hate? Yet I will be silent now.”

We reached Saugor, and the delight with which the officer received Ganesha from my hands could not be concealed. “A deep blow has been struck at Thuggee in the capture of this villain,” said he, “and thou hast done thy duty well, Ameer Ali.”

From that hour I rose in his confidence and estimation, and I have never forfeited it.

Ganesha's trial came on, and I was the principal witness against him. I told all I knew of the murders he had committed, and others corroborated my statements in the fullest manner. He was sentenced to die.

In vain was it that I entreated to see him before his execution; I wanted to taunt him with his fate, and to embitter his last hours, if anything I could have said might have done so. It was denied me; the officer knew of my purpose, and was too humane to allow it. But I saw him die—him and twenty others—all at the same moment. He saw me too, and cursed me, but his curses were impotent. They all ascended the fatal drop together—refused the polluting touch of the hangman—adjusted the ropes round their own necks—and exclaiming “Victory to Bhowanee!” seized each other's hands, and leaped from the platform into eternity. I watched Ganesha, and I joyed to see that his struggles were protracted beyond those of the others. I was satisfied,—he had paid the debt he owed me.

And now, Sahib, after this event, my life became one of dull routine and inactivity. One

by one I tracked and apprehended my old associates, till none of them remained at large. The usefulness of my life to you has passed away, and all that I can do is at times to relate the details of some affair I may either have witnessed, or heard from others. Why should I live? is a question I often ask myself; why should an existence be continued to me in which I have no enjoyment, no pleasure, no care, not even grief. I have remorse but for one act, and that will never leave me. Yet I must support it until Alla pleases to send the angel to loose the cord which binds my life to the clay it inhabits.

I used often to think on my daughter, but her too I have almost forgotten; yet I should not say forgotten, for I love her with a parent's affection, which will last to the latest moment of my existence. But she is happy, and why should she know of me?

I fear that I have often wearied you by the minute relation of my history; but I have told all, nor concealed from you one thought, one feeling, much less any act which at this distance of time I can remember. Possibly you may have recorded what may prove fearfully interesting to your friends. If it be so, your end

is answered; you have given a faithful portrait of a Thug's life, his ceremonies, and his acts; whilst I am proud that the world will know of the deeds and adventures of Ameer Ali, the Thug.

THE END.

